JOURNAL OF
DHARMA

RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND SECULARISM

April-June 2007 Vol. 32, No. 2

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chief Editor: Saju Chackalackal, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, P.O. Dharmaram College, 560 029 Bangalore, India. Tel: +91-80-41116219; 6111(office). Web: www.chackalackal.com; E-mail: saju@chackalackal.com

Associate Editors: Augustine Thottakara, *Rajagiri, Kalamasserry*; J. G. Arapura, *McMaster*, *Hamilton*, *Canada*; Thomas Aykara, *CSR*, *Pariyaram*; Thomas Kadankavil, *Kottayam*; Thomas Kalam, *Bangalore*; Antony Kalliath, *NBCLC, Bangalore*; Thomas Manickam, *South Africa*; Thomas Manninezhath, *Namibia*; Kuncheria Pathil, *Jeevadhara*, *Kottayam*; Joseph Pathrapankal, *Anugraha*, *Kottayam*; William Sweet, *St. Francis Xavier University*, *Nova Scotia*; Kurian Kachappilly, *DVK*, *Bangalore*; Angela Wong Wai Ching, *Chinese University of Hong Kong*, *Hong Kong*; Mathew Chandrankunnel, *DVK*, *Bangalore*, Sebastian Alackapally, *DVK, Bangalore*, Jose Nadhikkara, *DVK, Bangalore*.

Board of Consultants: M. Amaladoss, *Vidyajyothi, Delhi*; J. P. Clayton, *Boston University*, *USA*; John Bowker, *Cambridge*, *UK*; Jung Young Lee, *Drew University*, *New Jersey*; Jyothi Sahi, *Bangalore*; G. J. Larson, *University of Indiana*, *USA*; Thomas Mampra, *Pune*; J. Masson, *Belgium*; Albert Nambiaprambil, *Upasana*, *Thodupuzha*; Oberhammer, *Vienna*; R. C. Pandey, *New Delhi*; Thomas Kochumuttom, *Risikesh*; Mathias Mundadan, *Jeevass*, *Aluva*; G. C. Nayak, *Bhubaneswar*; Raimundo Panikkar, *Barcelona*, *Spain*.

Book Review Editors: Mathias Mundadan and V. Venkatakrishna.

Executive Secretaries: Libeesh & Marialal, DVK.

Journal of Dharma is a scholarly research publication of inter-religious studies on current issues of religion, philosophy, and theology. While the editors recognize the need for free expression of differing opinions by our collaborators and contributors within the natural limits of academic freedom and responsibility, they do not necessarily subscribe to their views.

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

April-June 2007 Vol. 32, No. 2

RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND SECULARISM

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
DVK, Dharmaram College P. O.
Bangalore 560 029, India
Tel. +91-80-4111 6111; Fax: +91-80-4111 6000
E-Mail: info@journalofdharma.com
Website: www.journalofdharma.com

CONTENT

Editorial: Religious Literacy and Secularism.. 105
Saju Chackalackal

1. Faith, Knowledge and the Plural: The Problem of Fundamentalism .. 115
Etienne Rassendren

2. The Independent Madrasas of India... 133
David Emmanuel Singh

3. A Map for the Pilgrimage to the Other 153
George Thadathil

4. The Catholic Mass in a Secular World 163
Marco Ornelas

5. A Vision of Unity: Outlines of a Holistic Worldview 181
Dylan Esler

6. Religious Literacy in Interfaith Contexts.. 191
Albert Nambiaparambil

7. Relevance of Advaita Vedanta in Christian and Scientistic Age 213
Bruce G. Wollenberg

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 105-113

Editorial

RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND SECULARISM

Religion is a structured expression of the human quest to establish and maintain relationship with the divine along with the human and the cosmic without losing the perceived distinctive identity of any but at the same time enabling continued transformation of all in an integral manner. The foundational experience(s) around which a religion evolves becomes the spirit that would overwhelmingly pervade and permeate the lives of those who ultimately accept it/them as their point of view as well as way of life. A particular view of life and the way of life that emerge from the foundational experience in its pure form give shape to a spirituality, which would be characteristic of the life of all those who come under the banner of a particular religion.

The faith-kernel around which a religion comes into existence receives manifold expressions in the process of its evolution. A faithful expression of the faith is called forth, and is usually understood and accepted in a uniform manner by those who come together and are united in one faith. Although it is not easy to accommodate alternative viewpoints at the very early stages, structural expansion and the intake of more members would naturally call for diversified understanding of any particular religion. Moreover, the individual perspectives in understanding and expressing the same faith content adopted by various believers necessitate a more dynamic and diversified expression of the religious tenets of any religion.

It is generally accepted that the augmenting of a religious point of view into a structured religion is facilitated and enhanced by the ability of those who share a faith vision by communicating it effectively to larger groups of human beings. The essential social dimension of religion, especially from its structured development, is catered to by various mechanisms employed by people subscribing to a religious point of view, among which the transmission of a religious tradition (centred around one ore more foundational experiences) through oral and written media deserves special attention.

The necessity on the part of any religion to put across to an audience its central experience (in the form of teachings) with a view to bring them into its fold created an indispensable ambience that enhanced not only the literacy of those who were involved in communicating it, but also among most of the people whom they had to reach out. Thus, religion turned out to be a principal agency that contributed to the enhancement of literacy in the larger society across the globe. Moreover, wherever religion was in close collaboration with the ruling class, their mutually enhancing collective operations gave rise to still better opportunities to augment the literacy of the people at large.

The advancement in the literacy level of the public, facilitated by a religious predicament, however, had turned out to be a powerful source of challenge as well as a source of inspiration to religion. That is, the advance in the religious as well as general literacy calls for a better or more coherent and consistent articulation of the religious experience and teachings. The initial stage in the development of any religion, considered to have ideally nurtured the foundational experience(s), is abundant in creativity in giving shape to the experience(s) in the form of rites and rituals, teachings and dogmas, traditions and structures, though this early stage is said to be lacking in critical perspective. Literacy facilitated by religious expansion is one of the important factors that later comes to aid critical acumen, at least, among some believers.

It is highly possible that those who wield power[1] within the precincts of a religion would try to suppress diversified understanding and interpretation of the basic tenets. In the normal circumstances, it is said to be resulting from the thrust of safeguarding the original faith content, which has to be protected if the new view of life and way of life are to be established as distinctive and decisive. Although historical records indicate that some of them end up in schisms and bitter divisions, sometimes even based on the challenges posed against the pseudo-spiritual powers assumed by the leaders, from a positive angle, they testify to the undeniable and unlimited sagacity and creativity present in human understanding. While, on the one side, it may cause fragmentation of the structural growth of a religion, on the other, it would obviously highlight the level of literacy enjoyed and the ability to proactively respond to the evolving traditions subscribed by the members of a particular religion.

---

[1] At this early stage in the development of a religion, it would be extremely difficult to distinguish between spiritual and temporal powers, though the claim would be made primarily based on the former.

Sometimes, however, the initial enthusiasm and unconditional acceptance among the followers make room for the religious leaders to spin absolutism into doctrinal formulations and ritualistic performances, leading to religious intolerance and even fundamentalist attitudes. This had been the case with some of the organised religions. It leads to another stage in its development whereby some of these religions lose their ability to further integrate emerging viewpoints from among the later generations. Although difference between the foundational experience of the first group of believers and the experience gained by later generations cannot be ignored, a total disregard of the uniqueness of the faith experience of the latter would only close down the possible novel avenues of intellectual openness and faith experience suitable to the times.

Definitive doctrinal formations, though try to provide intelligible formulation to the content of belief, turn out to be a point of contention; the consensus emerging at one point in the historical development of a religion that finally crystallizes into dogmas points to cautious approaches that the authority would adopt later in protecting the authentic doctrinal foundation. In fact, most of the bitter internal conflicts that religions have faced in their evolution may be classified into this category; true, its intensity was augmented by political alliances of those who spun certain nuances and alternative interpretations to the already accepted dogmas.

Although the mainstream believers were all too happy to follow the dogmatic thrusts, there were always a sizable group of ‘enlightened’ believers who were not ready to accept the dogmas as final. While some of them would accept the dogmas as facilitating factors for the proper but progressive understanding of a religious faith, some others were totally against any definitive structural expression of the faith content. However, those who claimed authority always resisted the moves of the ‘enlightened’, claiming that any authentic interpretation could be provided only by those who are in authority, thus, in effect, rejecting the understanding and affirmations of the former.

One way of protecting a religion from the onslaught of the ‘enlightened’ was to brand them as secular[2] as against the spiritual.

---

[2] Secular, deriving from the Latin word *saecularis* literally means worldly; in its modern use, the sphere of the secular is considered to be distinct from the religious. Although a secular thrust is said to have made the groundbreaking for

While the spiritual is the authentic (as it has its source in God/Divine/Reality), the secular comprised of all that is considered to be against it (as it is worldly and human in its nature). Or else, from another angle, anything that could not be accepted within the precincts of authentic spirit of a religion was branded as secular, though the use of the term is said to be very late in origin. Although the term was not in vogue, the reality was already there alongside the religious and the spiritual. As secular is generally understood against the spiritual, I propose that these two cannot be realized without the other; that is, there cannot be spiritual without secular, and there cannot be secular without the spiritual, as they assume more of a complementary nature than that of contradictories.

God's revelation is accepted as the source of the spiritual and the religious; human reason is considered to be the ultimate court of appeal in the secular. While the first asserted the need of responses from the human founded on divine authority, faith and the values derived there from, the latter insisted on reinstating the role of reason and human values.

Whatever be the height and depth of a religious experience, and whatever be the breadth and strength of a religious authority, any spiritual endeavour is basically a human endeavour. The moment we lose sight of the human dimension in any spiritual experience or religious tenet, it would lose its sagacity. Religion and spirituality have been of great appeal to the ruling class as well as the masses precisely because they have the human dynamics running through it. As the human is basically characterised by the endowments that human beings have acquired, primarily characterised by reason, any human enterprise – whether it is religious or spiritual or any other – it cannot but be fundamentally human. That is, anything religious is fundamentally secular at the same time. If the secular dimension is missing, secular being associated with all that is human including rational, a religious or spiritual thrust cannot be maintained.

---

modern scientific development in the West, it would be practically impossible to rule out the presence of the secular forces all through the history of religions and spiritual movements. In order to focus the thrust on the scientific and an ethos emerging from it, its subscribers took an extreme position of contrasting it with the spiritual, thus further widening the gap between spiritual/religious and the secular/worldly, though such distinct realities remained only on conceptual levels.

Although universal rejection of secular by the religionists could be seen in many a religion, an unprejudiced analysis would show that an integral growth of any religion was facilitated not exclusively by the spiritual that shuns the secular, but only by those who have taken recourse to a balanced approach to the spiritual and the secular. In fact, the secular had a lot to contribute to make the spiritual or religious more appealing to the masses, as a 'worldly' dimension made the spirituality and religious ethos more akin to the world of believers. While aspiration for spiritual solace was a primary factor in the making of a religion, its ability to circumscribe the 'worldly' was equally a powerful element in enabling religion's popularity.

It is true that, in the western model, the secular was found to be missing from the mainstream Christian religion over a long period of its existence. It was one of the reasons why it turned out to be more authoritative and less capable of addressing the needs of the people. Unfortunately, various developments caused Christianity to drift away from the people: a lot of believers failed to find meaning and relevance in following the doctrines that were issued by the authorities from time to time. Moreover, there were cases in which some people who wrongly assumed authority in such contexts started exercising it in opposition to what the masses had expected: they miserably failed in delivering the spiritual; at the same time, they were equally stunted in addressing the secular needs of the believers. In effect, such a religion caused the spiritual and the secular to drift away from each other.

In the modern world we see the net result of all these dynamics: while religious authority continued to claim its own ability to address the needs of the people, many kept away from it as they believed that religion is incapable of delivering the goods for which it claims to exist. Further, as the latter group claimed the failure of religion in addressing the needs of the people, they asserted that all those goods can be redeemed and established by forces that are outside religion, thus affirming the might of the secular against the religious. In fact, it is here that we come across with the western academia insisting on a wide gap between the spiritual/religious and the secular.

As it is clear from history that such a gap has resulted from the lack of due consideration for the essential dimensions of religion proper, any attempt to re-establish the proper role of religion and spirituality in the lives of human beings should harness the aspects that have already been lost sight of. Principally, religion should take the initiative to assert that the secular is not at all an extrinsic aspect, but an intrinsic dimension to religion, a dimension which would make it more integral and holistic, a dimension that enables it to be a catalyst in human development and social ethos.

In order to redeem this lost dimension within the precincts of religion, a new identity is to be developed. As this has to be an all pervasive process, covering the whole range of believers, it has to start at the level of religious literacy. In the twenty-first century, a kind of re-catechising is called for among all religions. While retaining the sacred literature and the value of traditional interpretation of these texts, an innovative approach is to be initiated in dealing with the sources and their ability to address the issues that believers confront today.

What we need today is not merely a lot more of religious literature, but religious literacy proper, which will enable the believers to develop an integral perspective on the sources that make up the kernel of a religion. It has to be deeply religious as well as human, implying that religious literacy cannot be enhanced without the dimensions contributed also by reason-related capacities.

The much hyped antithetical nature of spiritual/religious and secular is only a misnomer. Some people who want to deny or at least counter the value of the spiritual/religious within the human realm are trying to muster power by themselves claiming that all that is religious is against human; according to them, redeeming the human cannot be a reality as long as the religious reality is affirmed. However, given the fact that denial after denial of the religious reality by intellectual stalwarts over the centuries has not been successful to kill the religious spirit; instead, it is coming out more powerfully, though in more dynamic and diversified forms addressing the variegated needs of the emerging humanity.

Then, in view of redeeming and catering to this fundamental aspiration of humanity, it is essential that we reinstate the integral balance between the spiritual and the secular, though it would continue to be denied and opposed by some, including some world-renowned intellectuals, especially from the West. Each society and its religions need to address the distanciation that had come about between them in the given historical contexts, and bring about a more coherent and amicable settlement for good so that the spiritual aspirations of our human community will not be exclusively constrained to the private spheres, but would permeate every sphere that is characteristically human.

Secularism, in this context, is not at all a threat to the religiosity and spirituality. The 'worldly' and the 'rational' are not antithetical to the spiritual; they certainly constitute its integral dimensions that would enhance its dynamics and make it more at home with the believers who are thoroughly human. Bringing the secular to the spiritual, to my mind, is not like floating water and oil together; although the natures of these two do not seem to share any similarity, in my opinion, they both stem from the human craving for meaningfulness and commitment to the supernatural which, again, is not to be seen as contradictory to the natural.

Facilitating such an attitude within the precincts of religions can be done only by a collaborative activity of the religious authorities who claim to be the authentic stewards of original revelation as well as the tradition and patrimony that have developed around the original faith content and those who claim that secularism is the only cure for all social and religious woes. When these two camps come together and share a common platform, humanity can be assured of ushering in a new era. As they begin to function hand in hand, and invest their energies in a mutually enhancing manner, it would pave the way for the success of human spirit, positively opening up the avenues and assuring an incessant reaping of the fruits of spirituality and secularism as they have been reaped by human society before they were wrongly bifurcated due to historical accidents or purposeful manoeuvring of vested interests.

Journal of Dharma devotes this issue for a discussion on religious literacy and secularism. The first entry in this issue, "Faith, Knowledge and the Plural: The Problem of Fundamentalism" by Etienne Rassendren, tries to grapple the complexities evolving from fundamentalist tendencies that are visible in religious, cultural, and social spheres, be it in the case of Hindutva in South Asia, Christian Evangelism in Europe or America or Islamic Jihad in West Asia. A critical analysis of faith and knowledge in their entanglement with the this-worldly and the other-worldly realities seen in their specific contexts leads the author to conclude that intellectual dissent is the need of the hour to make room for the plural. So, Rassendren affirms: "to be truly religious and plural is to be inter-religious." David Emmanuel Sing, in his article on the relevance of independent Madrasas in India, affirms that apart from their commitment to the great Deobandi tradition they recognise plurality and pursuit of inter- and intra-religious peace. Moreover, he records that the Madrasa leadership is concerned about making its system of education more relevant to modern times, offering hope that a more literate Muslim community would re-vibrate with the ideals of modernity without losing sight of the kernels of Islamic faith.

"A Map for the Pilgrimage to the Other" by George Thadathil enters into a discourse on religious literacy in society in the context of its polarity with special reference to Indian society. It looks at the current emergence of this discourse, its specific features in India by situating within the secularist discourse, and then proposes a model that could be applicable even beyond the Indian horizons.

Marco Ornelas, in his entry on "The Catholic Mass in a Secular World," assuming that religions are communication systems, involves in an analysis of the Catholic (Latin Rite) Mass. Though a ritual involving a dogmatisation process, the Catholic Mass is capable of establishing a refined communication system, which, in turn, is capable of responding to the diminishing importance of religion in the secularized lives of its believers.

"Religious Literacy in Interfaith Contexts" by Albert Nambiaparambil offers an interesting narrative on interfaith encounters that have opened up new avenues in inculcating true religious literacy among believers of different religions. After recalling quite a number of interfaith encounters that happened in the eventful life of the author, he concludes that religious language has to be inter-religious language. Another entry on "Relevance of Advaita in Christian and Scientistic Age" by Bruce G. Wollenberg places Advaita Vedanta in conversation with Christian theology, and finds that both speak of a Reality that transcends the purely subjective and linguistic. Yet, he affirms that if these two systems were to involve in meaningful conversation each will have to abandon its hegemonic claim of universal validity.

Enhancement of religious literacy is the need of the hour all through the world of believers, especially against the background of the increasing number of conflicts among religious believers. Just as the believers are increasingly uninterested in grasping the nuances of their own religious literature, there is an alarming decline in the mutual understanding and appreciation among believers of different religions. Although this has resulted in many irreligious activities, and religion itself has apparently lost its relevance, sheer secularism (purporting to reject everything religious/spiritual) is not the solution to all these problems. Religious literacy – that inculcates respect for one's own religion as well as that of others – will only augment the true religious/spiritual aspirations without being detrimental to the social existence and development of humanity. As religion caters to a fundamental aspiration of human beings, it needs to be brought to its true stature where the values inculcated by the modern secularism could also be integrated. Since these two seemingly contradictory entities are basically human, their integration will only pave the way for the enhancement of human existence, both as individuals and as societies.

Saju Chackalackal
Chief Editor, JD

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 115-132

FAITH, KNOWLEDGE AND THE PLURAL

The Problem of Fundamentalism

Etienne Rassendren[◆]

1. Introduction

The foremost challenge to '*the plural*' in contemporary social contexts is the rise of different forms of religious fundamentalisms world-wide. These fundamentalisms are often represented as cultural nativism in resistance to the crisis of difference in the social sphere. Be it *Hindutva* in South Asia, *Christian Evangelism* in Europe and America and/or reactionary *Islamic Jihad* in West Asia, all assert a cultural or religious *difference* that consolidates to subjugate socially marginalized people. Often these sinister campaigns are posited against cultural and religious anonymity inserted by cultural homogenization and imposed on a variety of people the world over. Consequently, violent animosities between communities breed cultural stereotypes that structure the power-play of social hegemonies revolving around the discursive confusion between *faith and knowledge.* Popularly represented as the growing disconnect between the *sacred-transcendental and the material-human*, this confusion prevents any empowering *border-crossing* between cultures and religions, disenabling *syncretizing* of religious and cultural spaces in the social sphere. Religious and/or cultural communities turn either inwards in alienation or outwards in violent assertion, encrusting divisions and co-opting differences, respectively. Fundamentalism, then, is a complex terrain that demands critical attention because of its complicated uses of faith and knowledge.

I propose to map and delineate *three* seemingly unconnected elements of the politics of fundamentalism, the clearest antithesis to pluralism, identifying and illustrating their complications, engaging them in order to place them in perspective. The first will concern questions of *faith and knowledge* and how they entangle to confuse the *this-worldly* with *the other-worldly* perspectives of religious/cultural experience; the

---

[◆] **Dr. Etienne Rassendren** teaches English Studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. He has a Ph.D. in "African Studies and Identity Politics" from the Bangalore University. His interests include Post-colonial studies, race, caste, class and gender issues, cultural studies, nations and nationality questions and higher education issues.

second will relate to its location in the social hierarchies of specific contexts; in this section I will also argue that the religious triumphalism configures masculinities raising questions of gender in the contemporary social sphere; and in the third and concluding part, I will argue for intellectual dissent as a hermeneutic for the plural.

2. Faith and Knowledge: This-Worldly or Other-Worldly

2.1. Knowledge and Faith: The Encounter

There is, I argue, in Christian experience, a certain commonplace distinction between the notions of *Christian faith* and *Christian knowledge.* The former is represented as inspired and other-worldly and the latter is this-worldly and suspect. The former, as Edward Said suggests, belongs to the "sacred… a realm," "created by God" and "accessible only through revelation." It is often posited as "a-historical" and "complete" and opposed to any "analyzable history made by human beings."[1] This commonsense notion of Christian belief as revealed experience lives within faith-communities and is considered to be trans-social and outside secular knowledge. By contrast, the latter posits Christian religion as a social field of cognition elaborated and explained by religious documents, narratives, and performances, and to follow Foucault, shapes and is being shaped by the episteme of Christian thought.[2] This latter notion yields to secular debate, collaboration and dissent, without necessarily abandoning representations of revealed experience. Consequently, Christian knowledge becomes another critical discourse for analysis rooted in the 'this-worldly' experience of the social. It rejects inward-looking dogma that consolidates its constituency and it situates itself within the historical, cultural, and economic spheres. It resists belonging to the uninterrupted cycle of transcendence but resonates with the profane historical context.

The critical contradiction between Christian knowledge and faith represents a radical discursive split in Christian identity discourse. To be precise, Christian faith transcribes ideas of transcendence, an other-worldly sense of mystique, which enables/disenables social practice; while Christian knowledge translates thoughts and reflections that dis-empowers/empowers social change. Both are narratives of divinity, belief and ritual that include ideological mediation, premised on notions of truth and falsity. Thus, faith and knowledge are embedded in and bound to a politics of representation, which foregrounds, privileges and supports certain religio-spiritual claims transacted by their ideological agencies and their contexts. These narrative-retellings and their implications evoke certain social and cultural effects that refashion belief and structure practice. In its repeated shifts from the transcendent to the material, faith in religious belief, and the knowledge of religious faith structure a social-religious encounter, a pronounced epistemological struggle, construed as an irresolute philosophical polarity wherein *knowledge is the other of faith and faith, consequently the other of knowledge*. Then, it follows, if this encounter is irreconcilable and the separation categorical, that the sacred can never be profanized into a social dynamic as the profane, never sacralized as transcendental. However, the persistent projection of the transcendental into the real and its inescapable inversion suggest the inter-webbing between the this-worldly and the other-worldly. Thus, the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the social conjoin faith and knowledge into a system of social and spiritual praxis. This hybridization produces the socio-religious interstice, shaped either by appropriation or rejection of belief and/or knowledge while structuring the epistemic grid that develops religious discourse. Faith and its other, knowledge, bind and unbind in a radical hermeneutic that structures a social dynamic of transformation. Reading this critical encounter can fashion a more plural signification that empowers the social sphere. The uses of faith and knowledge, their separation and their intermingling, and not their inherent nature, structure this encounter. Often Faith is historicized and Knowledge is reified for purposes of hegemonic power, breeding fear and hate. As such, both the separation and the intermingling of faith and knowledge require a hermeneutic of interrogation that forges an alternative view of religious faith and social knowledge.

---

[1] Edward Said discusses "secular intellectuals" in relation to Vico's arguments on the "sacred" and the "gentile." For a fuller analysis, see Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, 118-147, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.

[2] I am gesturing here Foucault's analysis on discourses and the human sciences where he claims that knowledge production is situated in "an epistemological field" producing "archaeology" rather than merely "history." See, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. and ed. A. Sheridan, New York: Pantheon, 1966, xv.

2.2. Faith and Knowledge: The Separation

To extend this proposition and illustrate its effects, I deliberately choose rather divergent pieces of writing. Czeslaw Milosz, the now famous Polish dissident writer, writes that religions are "totalities with structures of their own" resisting "changes occurring around them." They constitute "collective belief" that assumes that the "desire to worship" would unravel "all the intricate questions" of existence. Milosz deploys religious experience as communal, intuitive, and transcendental; his notion emanates from a sense of mystical evocation, inexplicable, and insurmountable.[3] This notion is analogous to what Karen Armstrong, the famous historian, depicts as "rapture"[4] in the *Christian tradition*, the sum total of romantic ecstasy projected into transcendental fixity. In other words, this rapture is the ritualized exemplification of faith-experiences and, as Milosz suggests, the mystique of "blindness and heroism."[5]

2.3. Faith: Lineage and Trajectory

The millennial mystique originates in the biblical "*pistis*," a Greek word to mean 'faith'. This word, used in various contexts, invokes two other Greek terms, namely "*ergon*," meaning to "put right with God" or "justified in God," and "*dikaioo*," meaning "deeds," or "actions." Consistently, both in the Old Testament and in the gospels, faith is justified in God, only by social deeds and actions. However, in the Pauline texts "a man is justified by Faith, without the deeds of the Law" (Rom. 3:28). Paul, in fact, is speaking for the gentile communities recently assimilated into the early church. His claim debunks the Judaic tradition that excludes the newly evangelized as outcastes of the "Law" guaranteed by Yahweh. Paul re-interprets Abraham's justification in God as being mediated by his "faith" not His "works." Paul's hermeneutic shift effectively links the emerging community to the lineage of the Judaic patriarch. The conflict over the Pauline hermeneutic emerges in James' later writings where he restores the inter-relations between "faith," "deeds," and "justification." James is unambiguous about how the early Christian should be known: "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).[6] Hence, in James, translating faith into a social dynamic defines Christian identity, whereas in Paul, belief and action remain separate. Thus, the hermeneutic split over Christian praxis develops from the epistemological terrain of institutional development, the establishment of the universal church. The Gnostic nature of James' representation and his divergence from Paul validate the multi-vocal nature of the emerging universal faith. Moreover, it makes explicit that a unitary notion of Christianity is self-defeating and would totalize the vastly multiple nature of the Christian message itself.

---

[3] I have deliberately chosen to consider the dissident poet Czeslaw Milosz, simply because of his catholicity, on the one hand, and his concern for the popular and the people-centric, on the other. Hence, I gesture Milosz for the newly acquired status of a faith-commentator of Eastern Europe. For further reference, see, Milosz, Czeslaw, "On the Turmoil of Many Religions" and "On Catholicism," in *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, trans. Richard Lourie, New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux Inc., 1982, 72-80; 81-86.

[4] Karen Armstrong is an ex-nun and a profoundly insightful but easily accessible historian of the religions of the world. Karen Armstrong, "The Offensive (1974-79)," in *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, London: HarperCollins Publication, 2001, 315-316.

[5] Milosz, "On Catholicism," 77.

This diversity of perception was implicated in the social, political and historical space that these agents of the new faith were located. They were responding to vastly encrusted social knowledge types that were integral to the spiritual and cultural struggle of the early years of Christianity. Hence, their narratives mobilized *difference*. If Paul chose to individualize faith and privatize inclusion, James attempted to re-define ritual and transform social practice. Thus, the formation of a faith-discourse emanated from the intensely contested conjuncture between social consciousness and identity, represented by James and Paul. Hence, to conceptualize faith as "rapture," as a kind of magical consciousness, imbued in the abstraction of the spirit deploys not only the dissociation from history but also an error of faith. In fact, James and Paul represent the conceptual tension, the epistemic disruption between individual Christian redemption and the social message of the gospel.[7]

No small wonder, then, that the Renaissance scholars and Reformation thinkers focused the Pauline texts abrogating the "shaman,"[8] the agent of interpretation. While such representations of personal redemption and individual salvation dislodged a degenerate priestly class and the protocols of domineering Christendom, they also plucked away the long tradition of prophetic critique of religious power. The Old Testament prophets were socially situated critics, living on the rims of and speaking against their society. They responded to the moral, social, and political crises of their times and often critiqued the Temple at Jerusalem for the abuse of religious power, though recuperating the social and moral significance of the institution in times of crisis. But the altered Reformation hermeneutic that recuperates Pauline perspectives could not prevent the imperializing violence of the discovery projects; Columbus, Da Gama, and Vespucci were considered Christendom's soldiers, "God-like arrivals,"[9] in the new lands. This hermeneutic fusion in the context of empire, between empire's foot-soldiers and divinity, the *other worldly* and the *this-worldly*, the eternal and the material, faith and knowledge, was a historical failure of Christian purpose. Hence, the silencing of the prophetic critique resulted in the unethical dominance and violence over the first-nation-peoples of the so-called 'discovered' territories. It, therefore, implies that all encounters between faith systems and knowledge-formations are not always emancipatory. Such subjugating intersections only expose a false consciousness of power that is invested in ideologies of conquest distinctly opposed to the gospel's social message. Imperialism, then, is anti-Christian.

---

[6] All references here are from the Revised Standard Version of The Bible. For reference, see *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Catholic Edition of India), Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publications of India, 1973. Once again, I use popular representations of Christianity here. Davis Danizier's studies and views on Christian Faith and its justification are deeply relevant in today's social conditions. All references here have been drawn from Danizier, found in www.worldwiz72/paul.html.p.3of 9. His views have now been collected in Davis Danizier, *An Alternative View of Christianity*, Escondido, California: Word Wizards, 2002.

[7] Danizier, *An Alternative View of Christianity*, www.worldwiz72/paul.html.p.3

[8] Bathes Roland, "The Death of the Author," in David Lodge and Nigel Wood, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, Second Edition, Delhi: Pearson Education Inc., 2005, 165.

In a sharp critique of North American personal pietism, Mark Burrows (2005), the historian, denounces the "legitimation" of a new "empire" that the neo-imperial Far Right ratifies as Christian. He identifies the "*Pax* and *Securitas*" definition of "peace" and "security" gained from dominance and conquest as the contemporary model of "homeland security" in the US today. Burrows further argues that this fusion between faith and empire jostles with a contradictory "politically disengaged" faith that reserves its post-messianic performance to the "other-worldly. Thus, ideologically invested readings of the Faith-mission stand alongside earthly power and against the marginalized masses, reserving the justice discourse for the other-worldly moment, while legitimizing elite power in the this-worldly experience. Thus, new age Christianity is a prosperity and domination theology that, as Burrows puts it, is "comfortable" with "nationalist power" … "in corporate boardrooms" spawning privileges for the already wealthy and powerful with no "responsibility toward the poor and the marginalized."[10] This, then, is an imperial faith, reminiscent of Constantine's Holy Roman Empire.

---

[9] Ann McClintock, "The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism," in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, New York/ London: Routledge, 1995, 26.

In his article on "church-state relations" (2005), Preman Niles, ecumenist and theologian, argues that the development of Christianity was always marked by an ambiguity of representation. When Christianity was in its infancy, the early church was a community of "expendables," according to Roman imperial law, often embodied in the working and unemployed masses, of their time. The Christian message, then, was a new "hope and life" only to the marginalized in the empire. When it became a "state-religion," it became a discourse of power often in assistance of the colonizing enterprise of Byzantium, to the omission of the "least" of the people that Christ assiduously represented. This emerging ideology separated belief and practice whereby subjects of the empire remained "Christian in name" rather than "in conviction." This separation consolidated into a contradictory unity, when the *Majesterium* called the crusades, not only to conquer the holy lands but also to resolve political disputes between Christian emperors. It organized Italy as the centre of all empire and created a heroic blindness of history. Crusaders set up new nations in West Asia, developing not merely an anti-Islamic union but also an anti-Semitic one. Indeed, the "God Wills It" mission spread; the marginalized were forgotten in favour of the universal hero of history. Christianity, thus, established a political order dissociated from the compassionate gospel. Obviously, the encounter between faith and the social, between belief and practice arose from the ideological terrain of knowledge of God and his Universe rather than on intuitive inspiration.[11] Perhaps the Milosz's valorisation of eternal mystique projects anti-totalitarianism but de-contextualizes faith.

---

[10] Mark Burrows, "'Peering into the Abyss of the Future': Empire in the Age of Globalization and the Call for a New Ecumenism," *Theologies and Cultures* ("Church and Empire") 2, 1 (June 2005), 36, 43, and 44.

[11] Preman Niles, "The Problem of Church-State Relations: Lessons from Church History and the Ecumenical Movement," *Theologies and Cultures* ("Church and Empire"), 2, 1 (June 2005), 85-100.

2.4. Christianity and the Mission

Contrast Milosz's conceptualization with the arrival of Christianity in the early years of mission life in "British India." In one of his chapters of *The Location of Culture* (1994 & 2007),[12] Homi K. Bhabha writes about simple Hindi-speaking rural men, women, and children congregating "under a grove of trees" and engaged in animated "conversation" over a translated book. Anund Messeh, the senior catechist at Meerut, after an "excited" and "hurried" journey arrived there to find that the excitement concerned "the Gospel of our Lord translated into the Hindoostanee Tongue, many copies" being "in the possession of the party." The Hindoostanee community claimed that the book came directly from an "Angel from Heaven," "at the Hurdwar fair" and through "a learned Pundit" who apparently had received it directly from the divine messenger. Anund Messeh explained that "these books teach the religion of the European Sahibs," but the people claimed that these were "God's gift."[13] Soon they were discussing food taboos, in relation to rituals of eating and drinking, connected to "not that entereth into the mouths of man that defileth him but which cometh out of the mouth." Through such engagements, these utterly uninitiated Hindoostanees negotiated perhaps the most oppressive norm of their society, namely *caste.* Anund Messeh reports:

> An indifference to the distinctions of Caste soon manifested itself; and the interference of tyrannical authority of the Brahmins became more offensive and contemptible. At last, it was determined to separate themselves from the rest of their Hindoo Brethren; and to establish a separate party of their own choosing...[14]

Bhabha employs this mission report to represent the arrival of the "book" as an experience of "wonder." The book, no more merely a "sign,"[15] turns into an epiphany of divinity. But the native Hindoostanee, despite Messeh, deploys the wonder as a sign: indeed, as an attack on caste. This translates the "book" into a "hybrid object"[16] that recasts European authority differently. It also erodes the evangelical agency of Messeh and mobilizes a social space that is both subversive of colonialism and caste.

---

[12] Homi Bhabha, the post-colonial theorist, quotes extensively from the "The Missionary Register," Church Missionary Society London: January 1818, 18-19. For details, see Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi 1817," in *The Location of Culture*, Chennai/ New York: Routledge, 1994/2007, 145-174.

[13] Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 146-147.

[14] Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 147.

[15] Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 149.

By contrast, Alan Machado's narrative of Christianization of the Goan-Mangalorean community, around the mythic Sarasvati River proposes an imperializing perspective. In his book titled *Sarasvati's Children: A History of Mangalorean Christians* (1999), Machado presents two imperialist perceptions about the inter-relations between Portuguese empire, Sarasvat migrations, local Hindu kingdoms and Muslim empire. One is that the Goan-Mangalore Christians trace their origins to Vedic Brahmanism situated around the mythic Sarasvati River; the other is that Christianization resulted from the fear of Muslim reprisals from the Bijapur Empire during Portuguese Conquest. Machado attempts to foreground the "*Velhas Conquistas*" post-Albuquerque and the Catholic Inquisition in Europe, as the historical departure towards the vigorous Christianization of Portuguese Lands in India. The *Velhas Conquistas* militarized *the Estado da India* as they *invoked* the "only by faith" discourse to provide subject-status to the erstwhile Sarasvat brahmins; in some sense, it provided the Sarasvats with a safe haven and continued social power even to settle economic disputes regarding local property. But Machdo invisibilizes the political alliances, coalitions, and re-alignments with Vijayanagara Hindu Kings and Generals that migrant Sarasvats arranged against the Bijapur Sultanate. In fact, Albuquerque was invited by Krishna Deva Raya and fought alongside Timmaya Nayaaka to recapture Hindu lands from the Muslim Sultanate. In effect, Machado pits Portuguese Empire and its proselytization against Islamic rule rather than Christianization against Vedic Brahmanism. The voluntary co-option into Portuguese empire is least discussed.[17] Thus, Machado's discursive project contains three serious historical inadequacies. Firstly, Machado brahmanizes Christianization; he totalizes the highly differentiated nature of Christian conversion. Somehow, for him, there is no other community that assimilated Christianity. Secondly, there is a serious problem of periodicity. Any historian will need to avoid conflation of historical moments because they confuse ideologies for specificities. There have been waves of Christian proselytization, each with purposes and trajectories often at variance with each other and differentiated by historical conjuncture. Thirdly, 19th Century Colonialism is vastly different from previous forms of imperialism because it was accompanied by Enlightenment modernity as Eric Hobsbawn argues in his stimulating and monumental analysis of world history.[18] Hence, Machado effectively does disservice to both historicity and social critique when he conflates, excludes, and elitizes the potential analytic of historicization.

---

[16] Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 164.

[17] Alan Machado (Prabhu)'s work suggests a historical alliance between the Portuguese and the Sarasvats. I have drawn these references from his work. See Alan Machado (Prabhu), *Sarasvati's Children: A History of Mangalorean Christians*, Mangalore: Camelot Publishers, 2002.

In opposition to Machado's historical conflation, discursive failings and brahamanic prevarications, Geoffrey A. Oddie, in his analysis, provides a more complex version of Mission history in India. In his latest book, titled *Imagined Hinduism: British Missionary Protestant Constructions of Hinduism 1793-1900* (2006), Oddie argues that European missions and secular Orientalists produced the religious and social category of "the Hindu," after religion was constituted as "an objective" system in Enlightenment scholarship. Otherwise, with the exception of Islam and Judaism, scholars encountered a complicated difference in the so-called "paganisms," which punctuated the non-Christian world. Working from travellers' accounts, British Missions structured a hold-all pan-Indian system of beliefs controlled by Brahmans as Hinduism.[19] This, perhaps, substantiates the prevailing attitude of colonial times, which debunked Sanskrit and Persian knowledge as infantile wisdom.[20] As Oddie argues powerfully, other forms of ethnic worship, particularly in the Tamil speaking south, were dismissed from this dominant perception. Oddie suggests that the Hinduization of India happened on the colonial terrain of ideological transactions between the Missionary zealots and Brahman intellectuals of that time. Hence, contemporary Hindutva discourse which attempts to re-totalize the plural social sphere now recuperates a colonial product rather than an anti-colonial one. Moreover, European Missions carried highly differentiated trajectories; but British colonialism homogenizes them to suit their own totalized view of Hinduism in order to absorb it into the colonial agenda. What it excludes are the empowering contributions made by Christian Mission for social transformation:[21] for instance, James Long's involvement in peasant movements in 19th Century Bengal,[22] William Carey's fight against slavery and exploitation,[23] and Alexander Duff's ideological discontent with caste hierarchy.[24] Even postcolonial theorists document extensively the bitter feuds missions had with colonial governments for their social failures: "abdication of the Christian duty ... to ameliorate the condition of the downtrodden" and their failure to alter "attitudes to caste."[25]

---

[18] Eric Hobsbawn, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, London: Abacus, 1994/2003.

[19] Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Missionary Protestant Constructions of Hinduism 1793-1900*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006.

[20] Thomas Babington Macaulay is extensively critiqued for his Anglicist perceptions in Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

The imperial agenda, when it absorbs the social gospel, produces a tripod identity-split: that is, (i) the dominating Christian-Orientalist self in the service of colonialism, (ii) the dominant Hindu Other transacting with British imperialism against Islamic (Mughal) invasion, and (iii) the subjugated Islamic other as invading oppressor of Hindu "India." In his "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism" (1995), Partha Chatterjee argues that despite their claims against British colonialism the upper caste Hindus perceived British rule as a liberation from the *Yavana* rule of the *Musalaman*. The earliest Bengali historians attempted to historicize Vedic memory and stitched together Vedic mythology with Hindu history on the terrain of British colonialism: "It must be loudly declared that it is to bless us that *Isvara* had brought the English to our country."[26] Hence, Christian Missionary work in India is highly differentiated and depended on the ideological apparatus that negotiated its alliances and resistances in that period. The upper caste Hindu elite colluded with British colonialism in order to Sanskritize the polyphonic nature of Indian Culture. Thus, for late

---

[21] Gauri Vishwanathan clearly and studiously organizes an analysis of the bitter fights over the orientalist attitude of governor generals and viceroys. For further details, see Gauri Vishwanathan, "*Prepaeparatio, Evangelica*," in *Masks of Conquest*, 45-67.

[22] See Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Missionaries, Rebellion and Proto-Nationalism: James Long of Bengal 1814-87*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999.

[23] Niles, "The Problem of Church-State Relations," 89-90.

[24] Vishwanathan, "The Failure of English," in *Masks of Conquest*, 152.

[25] Vishwanathan, "The Failure of English," in *Masks of Conquest*, 152.

[26] Partha Chaterjee quotes from early history text-books of the 1870's. For details, see Partha Chaterjee, "History and the Nationalisation of Hinduism," in Vasundha Dalmia and Heinrich Stienteneron, eds., *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995, 114.

Christian-colonial and early Hindutva-nationalist discourse, the inimical other was Islamic rule; polytheist Hindu faith as local culture was silenced.

In this respect, Bhabha's notion of Christian arrival narrates a popular reception, a people-centric appropriation, whose uses disrupt caste-ideologies and European moral authority at once. Anund Messeh as a British informant is ignored, while caste taboos are contested and refashioned.[27] In this instance, one recognizes a serious discontinuity with historical commonsense, a discursive *rupture* of colonial history and Christian Mission in the 1800's.

This historicity of Christian mission is integral to the *production of knowledge in Christianity*. What is particularly empowering is how simple people translated the Christian message into a subversive anti-caste discourse. They transferred religious *rapture*, the wonder of the book, into social *rupture*, forcing even its ideological agency to reformulate the trajectories of the sign to contest hierarchized contexts of orthodox "India." Thus, the displacement of the *rapture* of Christian faith as eternal transcendence is replaced by the *rupture* of Christian knowledge as social mobilization.

I argue that the this-worldly transfer of religious rapture into social rupture has to be differentiated by a "situatedness" of representation[28] and not as a productive universal; for such ruptures can be invested with imperceptible power that hegemonizes social processes and reifies elite cultural ideas. As I have observed above, whenever faith – Christian, Hindu or Islamic – serves imperial ideologies or any form of elite authority, it is but an abstraction of limitless power, that endangers, threatens, destroys, and annihilates the everyday hopes and aspirations of people; when associated with social transformation and speaks and acts on behalf of people's social and political concerns, it is emancipatory. Thus, I argue that faith uses dominant knowledges to coerce and subjugate but deploys subaltern knowledges to affirm and liberate. But faith simply cannot exist without knowledge either.

In the emerging context of "*Pax Americana*," where the apocryphal Christ, is the "favourite political philosopher," faith is in the service of "the politics of privilege" that fuses "empire with religion."[29] It rages in biblical literalism, which coerces the world against its others: Islamic people and West Asian societies, for instance. The war in West Asia, then, is seemingly the neo-Christian approach to the Kingdom of God on earth. Apparently, there is a continuity between faith and the social, between belief and performance and, hence, between the other-worldly and the this-worldly. I argue, however, that it is precisely this selective interpretation and its associate representation that breeds the separation between faith and knowledge while claiming the contrary. If the Christian message is on behalf of the "*anawim*,"[30] – the Hebrew term for the marginalized – contemporary Christianity is in contradiction with its performance; who but the poor, the deprived, and the women receive the violence of a Christianized imperial agenda!

---

[27] Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 150.

[28] Allen Graham, *Intertextuality: New Critical Series*, London/New York: Routledge, 2007, 132.

[29] Burrows, "'Peering into the Abyss of the Future'," 37, 41.

The key discourse that structures this performative split is fundamentalism and, as I will argue in the next segment, is structured on the formation of contemporary forms of masculinity.

3. Knowledge, Power and the Problem of Fundamentalism

3.1. Hindutva and Gender

First used by the Protestant Christians, the term "Fundamentalism" implied the restoration of the foundational principles of the faith. It steadily acquired differing meanings that were displaced onto other institutional frames such as the nation and civilization. When Hindutva refashions national identity, the American moral majority defines western civilization and fringe Islamic tradition determines reactionary *jihad*, the power of selective faith structures what Edward Said called "coercive knowledge": i.e., social coercion for limitless power.[31]

In the "Indian" context, the polytheistic nature of Hinduism permitted a religious character that transacted between ethnic animism and Vedic Hinduism to produce a reconciliatory encounter of the everyday. The mythologizing of history, as in Mahabali and Onam, and the historicization of mythology in the *Ramakathas* proposed a cultural inclusiveness that transcended dogmatic religiosity or cultural homogeneity. In this sense, faith and knowledge were held in a productive dialogue between what Karen Armstrong calls *mythos and logos*[32] the realm of belief and the space of history, respectively. However, this productive process has been transformed into a cultural trope invested with significations that replace history with myth.

---

[30] Fred Kammer, "Elba and the Cycle of Bal," in *FaithJustice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, New York: Paulist Press, 1991, 13-40.

[31] Said's work covers this issue of coercion. See Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," 116-147.

The new Hindu iconography, beginning with the Sati-Devi movement in Rajasthan through the *Ramjanamabhoomi* movement in Ayodhya and into the genocide in Godhra 2002,[33] develops the masculinization of the Hindu faith and the feminization of Hindu violence posited against Islamic maleness, treachery and violence. Hindu men and women encouraged *sati* as an exemplar of *Pati-Parameshwar* fidelity, foregrounding motherland as a trope of Indian homeland, while mocking the effeminateness of Hindu men and threatening the presence of Muslim men;[34] *Kar sevikas* chanted and sloganeered for their militant men, as they pulled the Babri Masjid down,[35] gheraoed and assaulted objecting professionals in Bombay, and called other secularists "eunuchs"[36] in public meetings; fanatical Hindu women accompanied their male counterparts as they destroyed, looted, raped, and plundered Muslim localities in Gujarat 2002; Muslim women were raped and killed as an assumed reprisal for Hindu hurt and against "the internal enemy."[37] All these show the programmatic rise of fundamentalist faith translated into violent practice.

---

[32] Armstrong, "Introduction" in *The Battle for God*, xiii.

[33] Sikata Banarjee, "Hindu Nationalism and the Construction of Woman: The Shiv Sena Organizes Women in Bombay," in Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women on the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995. Also, Baxi Upendra, "The Second Gujarat Catastrophe," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, 34 (24 August 2002), 3525.

[34] Banarjee, "Hindu Nationalism and the Construction of Woman," 216-232.

[35] See Anitha S. Manisha and Kavitha Vasudha, "Interviews with Women," in Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women on the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, 329-335.

[36] Sadhvi Rithamabara's passionate speech at the Babri Masjid/ Ramjanmabhoomi Site during the Kar Seva movements recorded in Anand Patwardhan (Producer), *Ram Khi Nam* (Film Text 1992) and *Father, Son, Holy War* (Film Text 1998).

[37] Purshottam Agarwal, "Surat, Savarkar and Draupadi: Legitimising Rape as a Political Weapon," in Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women on the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, 43, 44.

The conflation between the icons of Sita-Devi and Durga-mata,[38] a discursive fusion, produces Hindu masculinity. The female subjectivity accruing from such violence only explains that feminist praxis in this context is profoundly inflected by the production of Hindu masculinity. This radical Hindu self contains its other in the Indian Muslims as resisting modernity, its reason and logic.[39] Such commonsense is legitimized by intellectual argumentation as in V. S. Naipaul's *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (2002), which claims that Islamic communities have woken from "medieval culture" to the prospect of "oil and money" and to a "great new civilization" that they both "reject and depend on."[40] Many such discourses after 9/11 have supported the perspective that Islam lacks reason and the civil sense of democracy.[41]

3.2. Islam and the Gaze

In a cruel inversion of this cultural trope, Islam appropriates its *othering* as a re-assertion of difference, refashioning its stereotypes as self-representation. By this token, it returned to its pre-modern signs such as the *shariaa* and the *hijab* in order to represent a resistance to modernist violence. The epistemic break reformulated tradition to speak against western modernity, in order to resist global capital, monarchial tyranny, military dictatorship, and state violence. Begun in the late 1970's in Egypt, this revival mediated by young intellectuals from modern universities restored the literalist reading of the Koran and the *shariaa*. Later to be constituted as Madarasaas, these Islamic camps included men and women who, disappointed with the injustices of modernity, re-inscribed the signs of tradition into a contemporary dynamic that proposed the strict adherence to Islamic spirituality, law and behaviour. It is in this context that the *hijab* returned as a sign of cultural assertion that women by choice apportioned for themselves: *hijab*-wearing women hold progressive views on feminism; they hold positions of power in government and the political structure; they are involved in varied poverty-alleviating projects; they are in constant argument with their clerics.[42] All are silenced in the service of the "ethnographic gaze"[43] that exoticizes the victimhood of Islamic women. It is this reification of subjugation that ultimately produced the talibanization of West Asia, which introduced new gendering protocols against working women, social leadership and economic production.

---

[38] Tanika Sarkar, 'Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organisation in Hindutva Politics" in Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women on the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, 192, 194.

[39] Akeel Bilgrami, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on the Enlightenment and Enchantment," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, 33 (19-25 August 2006), 3591-3603.

[40] V. S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers*, cited in Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001, 114.

[41] Bilgrami, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea," 3592.

3.3. Gender and the Moral Majority

About the same time, in the West, particularly in North America, one saw the rise of the moral majority, led by Pat Robertson, highly rightist and deeply masculinist in orientation. Attacking modern secularist and male feminists, the moral majority claimed that the emasculation of men created male anxieties over sexual performance. They claimed that "Jesus was no sissy"[44] exhorting both men and women to take their appropriate positions in the social sphere. Integral to this discourse were the debates over intelligent design and pro-life projects that devastated the conditions of women of colour; they were always already "immoral."[45] The masculinization of Christ and the refashioning of patriarchy as difference destroyed the multicultural and constructed America as white, Christian and male. Such masculinities affected public policy and sought and won changes in the multi-cultural curriculum in schools; texts that taught evolution, condemned slavery, and promoted women's rights were removed. Instead, the dogmatic tracts of the moral right were introduced.[46] Thus, the masculinization of God and his Messiah was racialized in a disempowering homophobia that was to demand xenophobic immigration laws, racial majority protection and capitalist democracy.

In view of the above, I argue that fundamentalism knows no religion; neither does patriarchy. If fundamentalism uses faith to destroy the multicultural fabric of the social sphere, patriarchy uses it to produce masculine power. Patriarchy no longer inferiorizes the female *per se*; instead, it systematically valorises maleness. These discursive modes of faith and knowledge only attack the *philosophy of the everyday* and prevent effective crossovers; it restricts the multi-cultural celebration of difference. That apart, the homogenization of religion, the fusion between heroic belief and imperial knowledge, and the stereotyping of others merely consolidate an imagined masculinity, an encrusted machismo of religious and cultural ethics, permitting the transaction of a singular tradition at the cost of the plurivocality[47] of religions and cultures. Thus, fundamentalism is no critique but a re-visitation of conservative modernity, whose singularity violates progressive culture. Fundamentalism uses patriarchal modernity to speak on behalf of tradition. Its attack on the everyday rejects syncretist homelands that prefigure empires, nations, and civilizations. Therefore, I submit that fundamentalism is continuous with modernity and unlike in the prevailing commonsense, is not antithetical to it.

---

[42] Armstrong, "The Offensive (1974-79)," *The Battle for God*, 294.

[43] This specific case is related to a study carried out by Shravanthi R. and Nagesha, two students from St. Joseph's College, Bangalore, among *hijaab*-wearing Muslim women in Bangalore. They used the understanding of the Gaze as represented in Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 198-215.

[44] Armstrong, "The Offensive (1974-79)," *The Battle for God*, 312.

[45] Armstrong, "The Offensive (1974-79)," *The Battle for God*, 310.

[46] Armstrong, "The Offensive (1974-79)," *The Battle for God*, 315.

4. Conclusion: Intellectual Dissent as Re-Fashioning a Hermeneutic

So, what is the plural today? Does it entail the simplistic celebration of superfluities of differing cultures and religions in the social space? To offer a model of plural space would collapse into reifying otherness, the mimic reversal of all that I contest in my analysis. All we can aspire for are productive indications, emerging border-crossings, which will depend on re-forming *dissent* against/with monolithic fundamentalisms and masculine patriarchies. This underlying discontent as discursive ethic may shape a third language, a broken episteme, that is inclusive of, as Said would argue, “formerly un- or mis-represented human groups … in domains defined, politically and intellectually … as normally excluding them, usurping their signifying and representing functions, overriding their historical reality.” That, he claims, would produce a “new kind of knowledge” that would invoke “feminism or women’s studies, black or ethnic studies, socialist and anti-imperialist studies” that “challenge against the muteness, imposed” upon marginalized and gendered communities. This non-coercive alternative will depend on “communities of interpretation”[48] that are ready to build a “critical consciousness” rather than a “magical one,”[49] rooted deeply in the experience of people. This emerging consciousness will have to represent the “*anawim*” which embodies, the poor, the women, the orphaned, the least of the people – those that receive the violence of religious fundamentalism and patriarchal masculinities.

---

[47] Susan Bassnett, ed., “Introduction: Studying British Cultures,” in *Studying British Cultures*, London: Routledge, 1997/2003, xv.

[48] Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, 198, 200, 201.

If the dialogic imaginary should mediate the plural in the social sphere, it has to traverse beyond the bonhomie of religious and cultural tolerance; for tolerance too has its limits. The truly dialogic space is not the felicitous exuberance of difference and multiplicity; it is about the “clash between languages and utterances,”[50] and the possibility of reconciliation and resolution, which would shape a new way of thinking, an alternative hermeneutic of inter-religious and inter-cultural resonance we could provisionally call the plural. The plural will, then, emerge as a hybrid religious and cultural interstice where people of differing faiths and cultures will crossover into a genuine celebration of difference. For today, to be truly religious and plural is to be inter-religious; and to be truly humane is to be anti-patriarchal.

---

[49] Paulo Freire, “Education and *Conscientizacao*,” in *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London /New York: Continuum, 2005, 39.

[50] See for further references, Graham, *Intertextuality*, 165.

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 133-152

THE INDEPENDENT MADRASAS OF INDIA

Dar Al-‘Ulum, Deoband and Nadvat Al-‘Ulama, Lucknow

David Emmanuel Singh[◆]

1. Introduction

In recent years Madrasas have attracted immense attention in India, more so than Mosques and other endowed institutions of Indian Muslims. This has partly been on account of the general perception that fundamentalism,[1] Islamization,[2] and extremist violence stem from the Madrasas. The part played by ‘Deobandism’[3] in Pakistan and Afghanistan is perhaps responsible for this image of Madrasas in South Asia. Islamization in itself is not problematic. It becomes a problem when fundamentalism (and the intra and inter-religious fault-lines it accentuates) and violence (inter-faith conflicts leading to symbolic or actual suppression of diversity or bloodshed) come to be linked to the Madrasas.[4]

Madrasas of India do not form a single system. There are Shi‘a Madrasas[5] and Sunni Madrasas.[6] The Sunni Madrasas themselves are

---

[◆] **Dr. David Emmanuel Singh**, holding a PhD from the University of Wales, UK, is currently Research Tutor at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK and is the editor of *Transformation*, an international journal of Paternoster and Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. His publications include *Sainthood and Revelatory Discourse* (2003) and the forthcoming *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections on the Cross from Islamic Contexts* (Paternoster/Regnum).

[1] It is an ideology under-scoring the need to recover the traditional Islam.

[2] It is a process of establishing traditional beliefs and practices among ordinary Muslims.

[3] This is a philosophy purporting to be inspired by the premier Islamic seminary in South Asia, Dar al-‘Ulum in Deoband, India. The so-called Deobandi Madrasas, located in Pakistan, control a system of education, which nurtures a single vision of Islam with a view to raising a cadre of activist-scholars with a mission to counter a perceived external threat to Islam in South Asia, not least in Afghanistan.

[4] The Godhra arson in Gujrat is said to have been led by Mulla Umerji, an alumnus of Deoband. He is said to have had a close link with Deoband in providing financial support to the families of those accused and imprisoned. See more in D. E. Singh, “Hindu-Muslim Violence in Gujrat,” *Transformation* 20, 4 (October 2003), 206-216.

[5] Shi‘ism is a major sect forming about 15% of Indian Muslims. Y. S. Sikand’s interview with Maulana Sayyed Hamid ul-Hasan, principal, Jami'a Nazmia,

divisible into, at least, three different streams: Those that are endowment (*waqf*) board-run; the government of India keeps a close tab on such Madrasas, since their funding is controlled by boards acting under the government supervision. Although not managed centrally, 'the Deobandi Madrasas' are the largest independent group of Madrasas dotting the entire subcontinent; they are inspired by one of the premier traditional Muslim Seminary, Dar al-'Ulum at Deoband in North India. A relatively smaller number of Madrasas are inspired and run along the line of Nadvat al-'Ulama' at Lucknow in North India. Both of the latter two types are managed independent of the Government.

In this article, I attempt to draw readers' attention to two key independent Madrasas of North India, which are the chief models of Madrasa education in, at least, South Asia. Addressing the view that the hallmark of Madrasa education in India is essentially medievalist and separatist, I ask if this perception is not a trifle too simplistic. The fundamental argument is that even though these Madrasas are fully independent of *waqf* and government control, they are not hermetically sealed from the modern world and the challenges being faced by the wider Indian society. They have sought and continue to sincerely seek to be relevant.

2. Overview of Madrasas in India[7]

Indian civilization is ancient. It has been enriched, during this time, through the culture, language and religion of people-groups from different parts of the world. This plurality reflects also in India having had more than one system of education. Some of these systems go back thousands of years to the period of the Vedic *rishis* (sages) who taught that which they heard (*shruti*) and remembered (*smriti*).[8] These *rishis* were also called *guru* (teacher) and the centres of learning, teacher's estate (*gurukul*).[9]

Lucknow, a Shi'i Madrasa has likely been published by *Qalandar*; this author has the text of this interview sent to him by email dated June 01, 2003.

[6] Sunnism is the mainstream Islamic sect which forms over 80% of Indian Muslims.

[7] See http://hcilondon.net/studying-in-india/index.html.

[8] These are the two means by which divine revelation is communicated in the Vedic Hinduism.

[9] See chapter 20 in Acharya Gandhipati Tulsi, *Transmutation of Personality through Preksha Meditation*, trans. R. K. Seth, elec. version by S. Sisodhiya, at http://www.jainworld.com/preksha/tulsi/atptindex.htm.

Students lived with the *guru* and focused mainly on the development of wisdom and not just on the accumulation of knowledge. Two major fields of education existed: knowledge of the material world (*vidya*) and knowledge of the spiritual world (*vrata*). These centres were meant exclusively for the elite, for the system of paying fees (*gurudakshina*) was widespread. Consequently, the poor (almost always of lower castes) were generally excluded from receiving education. Students normally spent 14 years in *gurukuls* pursuing wisdom, knowledge, character and skills suitable to their station in society. The system is known to have produced writers, scholars, philosophers, warriors, and rulers.

The origins of Buddhism can be traced back to the year 563 BCE when Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was born. Buddhism was a great leveller. It defined itself strictly in relation to Brahminism: abandoning Brahaminic priesthood and rituals; possibility of all to attain the annihilation of soul (*nirvana*) or liberation (*moksha*), irrespective of ones ritual, economic and socio-political background. In Theravada system of Buddhism,[10] denial of the existence of gods whose bodily representatives Brahmins claimed to be, separation between the *karma* and the *dharma* of one's caste, *moksha* through the 'eightfold path' alone, and adoption of the 'middle way' rejecting extreme asceticism and wealth, created the conditions for an unprecedented levelling of castes and, hence, made education common and accessible to all. Buddhism saw to the establishment of the great institutions of learning, connected to monasteries, such as the ones in Nalanda[11] and Vikramshila.[12] The University of Nalanda is known to have had an enrolment of over ten thousand students, including a huge number of international students from the whole of Asia.[13]

---

[10] Theravada (doctrine of the elders) is inspired by Tipitaka, the oldest record of the Buddha's teachings; it is the predominant religion of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. Theravadists number over 100 million worldwide. Theravada holds to the 4 Noble Truths, which are conducive to the awakening: awareness of suffering, desire as the cause of suffering, suffering as not permanent, the 8-fold path as means to the end of suffering.

[11] Founded in the 5th Century CE, Nalanda was one of the World's most ancient universities; it lies in ruins about 62 kms from Bodhgaya and 90 kms from Patna, the capital of Bihar in India. Emperor Ashoka built many monasteries, temples, and Viharas here; see for pictures of its ruins at http://www.kalavinka.org/pilgmage/nalapics/nalapics.htm.

[12] Remains of the ancient Vikramshila University were excavated at the village of Antichak in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar, India; King Dharampala founded the University. See more at http://www.tourmyindia.com/states/bihar/vikramshila.html.

The genesis of Madrasas in South Asia is attributable to the Delhi Sultanate (13th century CE). The original purpose of the Madrasa was to equip the youth for the administrative service of the Sultanate. Whether these Madrasas incorporated the then known scientific subjects as preserved and expounded by the illustrious philosophers and mystics remains to be fully answered. But, given the proximity of the early 13th century to the great philosophical, mystical, and scientific temperaments of Ibn Sina (370/980-429/1037),[14] Ibn Rushd (520/1126595/1198),[15] Al-Ghazzali (d. 505/1111),[16] Ibn 'Arabi (560/1165-638/1240),[17] and the masters of the Chishti and Naqshbandhi brotherhoods (of whom Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi [1564-1624] and Shah Waliullah Khan Dehlawi [1703-1762] are especially significant], it is improbable that the Muslim rulers would ever have 'turned a blind eye' to these legacies. Examples of attempts made to bypass the liberal philosophical and mystical traditions may be found, but no tradition within the Islam of Indian subcontinent, remains unaffected by these inputs. It is known that throughout the medieval period, there existed a rich interchange of knowledge between Indian and Islamic traditions across the fields of theology, religion, philosophy, arts, architecture, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. Madrasas, during these times, were centres of higher learning with Islam forming the dominant backdrop. Madrasas served as the centres of education from where came the lawyers, doctors, philosophers, poets, clerks, etc., who served the society at large.

Similar to the Muslim rulers' policy of establishing Madrasas to equip administrative staff of government, Warren Hastings instituted a Madrasa in Calcutta (1781) to train government officers dealing with administering law among the Muslims. The Sanskrit Colleges of Banaras (1792) had a similar objective of equipping officials dealing with legal matters to do with Hindus. The motive was governance of Muslim and Hindu affairs in the absence of a unified code of law. These Madrasas differ from the later traditional Madrasas both on the scores of the purpose they served and the agencies responsible for their establishment.

---

[13] See http://www.indian-embassy.dk/culture_welcome.htm.

[14] Ibn Sina is also called Avicenna and *al-shaykh al-ra'is*.

[15] Ibn Rushd is Averroes for the west.

[16] He is known as the greatest Muslim theologian, philosopher and mystic.

[17] He is known as the 'greatest master of Sufism'.

The colonial expansion in the 19th century and the European missionary movement brought modern western education to India. The famous Hindu College was established in Calcutta in 1817. In 1834, the Elphinstone Institute was founded in Bombay. Several famous institutions of higher learning in Allahabad (Ewing Christian College), Kanpur (Christ Church College), Madras (Madras Christian College), Bombay (Wilson College), etc., came into existence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Calcutta, Chennai, and Bombay Universities were set up in 1857. Continuing the missionary enterprise in promoting western education, today, there are in India, over 226 universities and thousands of colleges affiliated to them, 428 engineering colleges and technological institutes, more than 100 medical colleges, scores of agricultural institutes and other professional colleges.[18]

Western education, which provided broader opportunities, gravely affected traditional Madrasa education. The job-market is inundated with graduates from modern western educational institutions. Since the decline and eventual cessation of Muslim rule in India, the graduates of Madrasas do not have job opportunities outside the *ummah*, apart from a handful of those who continue their studies in departments of Islamics, Arabic, Persian, or Urdu in some of the modern Indian universities. The more accomplished of these graduates from dual systems of education get absorbed in universities, the rest remain content with either teaching in the fast mushrooming Madrasas (Government or independent) or becoming leaders (*imams*) of the equally fast growing Mosques. The departments for *wqaf* (endowment; pl. *awqaf*) affairs, however, were established to look into the management of Muslim properties. In India, the central *waqf* board and its state subsidiaries functioned and continue to function through government grants and individual donations.

The Islamic concept of charitable giving (*sadaqah*) is founded on three Qur'anic principles: the interpenetration of spiritual and material life, the nature and purpose of Muslim community (*ummah*) and the trusteeship of wealth and property.[19] God is the absolute sovereign. The Prophet, his successors, his *ummah* and the state are instruments of God. Charitable giving becomes institutionalized through almsgiving (*zakat*) – one of the five essentials of Islamic practice – and *awqaf*. *Waqf* literally means 'to hold' or 'to confine'. This term is used in Islam in the sense of endowing and preserving something for the benefit of the needy among Muslims. It relates primarily to land and buildings (Mosques, Madrasas, and Hospitals) and, secondarily, to books, cattle, shares, stocks, and cash. The objective of *awqaf* is to meet needs, but it goes beyond mere service to the greater object of being near God.

---

[18] These figures may vary as there is a spurt in the growth of new higher education institutions in India in the recent past, partially attributed to the influence of globalisation.

It has been suggested that the *awqaf* are rooted to the very beginnings of Islam. The Ka'bah in Mecca, for instance, was entrusted to believers for not just the worship of God, but also to offer to 'the outsiders' the invitation to worship the One God. The mosque in Madina, built after the flight of Muslims (*hijra*) there, is said to be the second earliest example of the *waqf*. The two basic characteristics of *waqf* are: 'perpetuity' and 'permanence'. This means that the nature and purpose for which the property is originally endowed, in principle, remains unaltered. Thus, Mosques provide a place for communal ritual worship of God, hospitals for the care of the sick and the Madrasas for the education of the children, irrespective of their social, ethnic, and economic background and the vagaries of politics. Historically, rulers of India – Muslims, British, and Socialist-Secular-Democratic, and Hindu-Secular – have sought to maintain the principles of perpetuity and permanence despite rapid political changes.

Over the last few decades there has been an increasing polarization between mainstream Muslims and Hindus. The phenomenal growth and popularity of the Hindu cultural organizations, on the one hand, and the political success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, a Hindu political party) is said to be gradually affecting the manner in which *waqf* has functioned in the past. The most populous state of India, Uttar Pradesh (UP), contains the largest number of Madrasas in the country. In the last decade, UP has witnessed a quick rise to power of the ritually 'lower' castes represented by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The BSP has remained in power largely through a strategic alliance with the mainly high caste Hindu party, the BJP.

---

[19] See pages 7 ff. at http://www.amila.org/education/RetreatReadings2002.pdf; see also Mawlana W. Khan's paper on charity on pages 12-16 and the roots of charity in the Qur'an and the Hadith on pages 2-11.

In the middle of the last decade, the government of Uttar Pradesh (UP)[20] decided to apply the grant-in-aid scheme to nearly 135 Madrasas. Approximately, $2000000 were set aside as the aid budget for these Madrasas. This number was subsequently reduced to 68, alarming Muslims throughout India. The teachers' association of the Madrasas in UP openly condemned this decision.[21] In some areas of North India, Government holds a large number of *waqf* properties on behalf of Muslims. One of the allegations against the government has been that these properties have been leased out or, in some cases, due to consistent neglect the properties have been encroached upon by squatters or builders. For instance, the *waqf* board of Delhi has reportedly asked the Welfare Ministry to release 123 properties of the *waqf* to the board so that it can establish Madrasas and other welfare institutions for Muslims.[22]

In light of some such problems associated with the management of *waqf* properties and boards, the tenth *fiqh Seminar*, among others, made the following observations:[23]*Awqaf* are to be held in perpetuity. Muslims of India and government are responsible for their protection and development; sale or transfer of any *awqaf* is abhorrent. Mosques command greater sanctity than other *awqaf* and, therefore, its sale is absolutely prohibited even when it lies unused (i.e., even if the *namaz* is not performed there); even Mosques protected by archaeological department must be open for *namaz*; partition caused a great mass exodus of Muslims from India. Many Mosques, Madrasas, and other properties were simply left behind. Local Muslims and *waqf* boards have the responsibility to protect and maintain these; and the surplus *waqf* land endowed to Mosques can be used to establish Madrasas with appropriate provisions.

The widely current opinion of Madrasas being grounds for encouraging separatism based on Islam's fixation with the past has its genesis in 'Sepoy Mutiny' (1857). Ironically, the general Indian perception of this uprising was and continues to be that it was a 'war of independence' against the British. This perception was due to the fact that it identified in the British a common enemy who had to be evicted. The ailing Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Jafar, was widely acclaimed, at this point of time, as the ruler of India. The 'Sepoy Mutiny' did not obviously succeed. It succeeded, however, in hardening the attitudes of the British against Indians, not least Muslims. The 'Mutiny' also marked the beginning of the transference of India from being a Company territory to being subject to the Crown and with it a new sense of urgency to 'teach' the natives in the way of the West.

---

[20] The most populous northern state of India with the maximum number of Muslims in India and, hence, the endowed institutions.

[21] A. B. Masoud, "Madrasa Association Flays UP Government Decision," *Islamic Voice* 11-05, 124 (May 1997), at http://www.islamicvoice.com/.

[22] A. Akhter, "Release of Wakf Properties Demanded," *Islamic Voice* 12-07, 139 (July 1998), at http://www.islamicvoice.com/.

[23] 24-27 October 1997, Haj House, Mumbai; see fuller report at http://ifa-india.org/101th.htm.

The aftermath of the 'Mutiny' brought a realization of an immensely humiliating final defeat to the hundreds of years' long Muslim rule and civilization in India, but also witnessed an increasing polarization between the elite Muslims and Hindus. The common enemy, the British having left, Madrasas today are increasingly suspected of engendering pan-Islamic and anti-India (Hindu) sentiments.

Two principal routes of recovery of the lost empire were conceived by the Muslim elite in the immediate aftermath of 1857: firstly, alliance with the British and the revitalization of Muslims through western-scientific education; secondly, revitalization of Muslims though traditional Islamic education. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), a famous Indian Muslim ancestrally connected with the Mughal court, is well-known for his alliance with the British, and his views against the futility of rebellion. After the 'mutiny' he actively sought the revitalization of Muslims through western-scientific education. The Muslim Anglo-Oriental College he established later became the Aligarh Muslim University.[24] The College/University played a central role in the subsequent Indian politics.

Since, the *waqf* controlled other Muslims, being fearful of the decline of Muslim prestige, power, and civilization, led the counter 'Madrasa Movement' which sought to establish Islamic schools where the Arabic-Persian legacy as well as Islamic sciences, faith, and the way of life could be safeguarded. This was seen as the way by which Muslims in India could be revitalized. These were Madrasas that remained independent from the government controlled endowed Madrasas. Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband (1866) and Nadwat al-'Ulama', Lucknow (1893) are two chief examples of the several other similar traditional schools in India established in the latter part of the 19th century.[25] Today, there is an explosion of Madrasas inspired by the Deobandi model throughout Asia.

---

[24] See J. M. S. Baljon, *Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949.

The belief that these Madrasas have been fixated with the past needs, however, has to be revisited.

3. Dar al-'Ulum, Nadwat al-'Ulama': *Establishment of Nadwat al-'Ulama'*

The Nadva was established with a view to provide a balanced synthesis of the classical and the modern. The concern was to seek ways in which Muslims can learn to integrate the revealed fundamentals and the ever transforming world of modern knowledge. The Nadwat al-'Ulama' ('Nadva', in short) attributes the need for traditional Madrasas to 'the political ascendancy of the west'. The west with its emphasis on materialist and liberal secular values is perceived to have caused fissures within Islam, dividing Muslims into 'the modernists' and 'the orthodox'. The modernists uncritically adopted the western system of education, whereas the orthodox reasserted reliance on the infallibility of the way of life and thought of the 'Ulama' of the past.

In this context of conflict within Islam, Maulana Muhammad 'Ali Mungeri, a pupil of Mawlana Lutfullah Sahib of Aligarh and the spiritual successor (*khalifa*) of Shah Fazlur Rahman of Muradabad[26] emerged as the leader of a group of scholars following the tradition of the great 18th century reformer, scholar, and Sufi, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi.

This group of scholars laid the foundations of the Nadva aiming mainly to promote harmony among Muslims. It was believed that progress was only possible when Muslims united on a single vision of religion and its goals; with this agreement in place, Muslims themselves would be able to determine the extent of educational reform and improvements in the dated syllabi of the Arabic Madrasas.[27] The foundations of the Nadva were laid in the city of Cawnpore (Kanpur) in 1893 with Mawlana Lutfullah Sahib as its president. The Nadva had the following main objectives:

---

[25] For example, Mazahar al-'Ulum, Saharanpur (1866), Madrasa Baqyatris Salihat, Vellore (1883), Mazahar al-'Ulum, Banares (1893), Madrasa Aminia, Delhi (1897) and Dar al-'Ulum Khalilia, Tonk (1899), Madrasa al-Islah Azamgarh (1909), etc.

[26] All these hail from the state of present Uttar Pradesh.

[27] The Arabic Madrasas of the 19th century followed a dated syllabus on Islamic studies.

Reformulating the Madrasa syllabi taking into account the changed conditions of modern life, addressing the problems and questions of modern life by recourse to scriptures – the Qur'an and the Hadith, establishing a modern library aiding the study and research on Islam, propagating Islam through the writing and publication of literature, and equipping preachers to possess a sound knowledge of the scriptures and the world.

There is nothing here that suggests a simplistic obscurantist and medievalist Muslim agenda. Almost all of the mainstream Christian theological institutions can identify with the desire of a civilization on the decline to re-conceive itself along the lines suggested by these objectives. Initially, the Nadva functioned merely as an association of scholars who gathered in different town from time to time to discuss matter of importance to Muslims in the modern context. In order, however, to fully realize the objectives, the Nadva established a permanent school in 1898 at the very heart of the Islamic culture of the time, Lucknow.

The Nadva leadership draws its inspiration from the great eclectic Indian Sufi traditions. It, therefore, seeks to balance commitment to traditional faith with scholarship and the open-minded tolerant attitude of the Sufis. The leaders represented distinguished families and were widely recognized for their wisdom and scholarship. Mawlana Muhammad 'Ali Mungheri, the president of the association of the Nadva was appointed as the first General Secretary (*nazim*), an honorary position in the school. He was succeeded by Mawlana Masihuzzaman Khan, a resident of Shahjahanpur near Lucknow and the teacher of the former Nizam of Hyderabad. Mawlana Khalilur Rahman from Saharanpur, Mawlana Syed 'Abdul Hai, Mawlana Syed 'Abdul 'Ali and Mawlana Syed 'Abdul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi (1914-1999) followed him as the General Secretaries of the Nadva. Mawlana Nadvi was one of the most respected Muslim scholars of the 20th century India. Following the footsteps of Shibli Numani,[28] he became Principal of the Nadva in addition to being General Secretary. He is remembered both in the Muslim world and in the west as a distinguished scholar, preacher, reformer, and educationist and for his contributions to interfaith harmony.[29]

---

[28] Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) was a Lawyer, poet, historian, teacher, and nationalist from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh.

[29] His eclecticism is manifest from the fact that he was associated with the Chishti, Suhrawardi, and Naqshbandi brotherhoods of Sufism. He served as a

4. Study and Research Programs

The school was founded with the understanding that change was an essential ingredient for the success of Muslims in modern India. This necessity to change, however, did not involve dilution of the traditional, but affirmation of the dynamic nature of the faith. One of the changes the Nadva brought about into its system of education involved the removal of subjects from medieval period whose relevance today is hard to establish. This includes the dated traditional scholastic sciences which are irrelevant today due to the absence of the sects and disputes which gave rise to those sources. The Nadva included, in their lieu, the study of modern sciences and languages in its curriculum.

The Nadva study ranges from the primary to the university level. The total number of years required to go through this system of education is sixteen years. The Nadva today has a total of 4000 students located in the main centre in Lucknow and its branches. Students do not normally pay for boarding, lodging, and study. Approximately, one third of its students receive monthly stipends ranging from Rs. 25 to 100. The academic year begins from *shawwal* (October/November) and ends in *sha'aban* (December/January). The Nadva has today over hundred tutors.

The primary stage (6 years) includes the teaching of Urdu, Hindi, English, arithmetic, geography, and other sciences. This period of study includes subjects taught in the parallel secular system of education in India. This level consists of over 2000 students. During this period, those students who show an inclination about committing the entire Qur'an to memory are given special additional tuition. Approximately, 200 students take this as an elective.

---

member of the Deoband and was singularly responsible for the establishment of the Academy of Islamic Research and Publications at Lucknow. He was a productive writer. His works are prescribed as textbooks in several Arab universities. He also served as a visiting professor in a number of Arab universities. He served on the Higher Council of the Islamic University, Medina, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Islamic Universities, Rabat, and was Chairman of the Board of the Centre of Islamic Studies, Oxford. See for a good review of his contributions, Yoginder Sikand, "Islam and the Muslim Minority Predicament: Reflections on the Contributions of Sayyed Abul Ali Nadwi," *Qalander*, http://www.islaminterfaith.org/aug2002/article.html, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~alnur/ISLAM/GRMUSLIMS/Ali_Nadwi.htm, http://www.rauf96.supanet.com/syed.htm and http://www.nadwi.net/e/introdata.htm.

The secondary stage consists of a 3 year program after the primary stage. In this level, in addition to learning English, students also learn Persian and Arabic grammar, composition and literature. The higher secondary state consists of 2 years of study (corresponding to the high school of the parallel system of education). During this stage, students are taught Arabic, Persian, and English languages in addition to the religious sciences and Islamic history. The graduation (*'alimiyat*) stage is a 4 year long program. This parallels the intermediate and degree program of the secular system of education. During this period, students study the commentaries of the Qur'an, traditions, jurisprudence, literature, etc. At this stage, students also acquire higher knowledge of English equivalent to the intermediate level of the secular education.

Post-graduate stage (*fazilat*) is a 2 year long program after *'alimiyat.* During this stage students are instructed in advanced Arabic literature and other traditional sciences consisting of the commentaries, traditions, jurisprudence and Shari'ah. At this point, students are also required to submit their master's thesis on a subject of their choice. During this period they also do a course on comparative religions. The number of students at this level is small compared to the other stages of study. Selected students go on to study up to doctoral research (*takmil*). The normal duration of such researches is 2 years full time work under a supervisor from the Nadva.

In addition to these regular programs, the Nadva also offers special courses. A 5 year condensed course in Arabic and theology who have previously received an intermediate or a bachelor's degree from a recognized university in first or second division. This program entitles them to a degree of *'alim.* Those students whose mother tongue is English are taught in English. The Nadva houses a Department of Islamic Thought and Comparative Religions for those who wish to major in these fields. In addition to these, the Institute of Teachers Training at the Nadva offers a special teachers' training program to those who wish to go into teaching. Many of the Nadva graduates have gone on to study and teach in western, Arab and South East Asian universities. The Nadva receives students from the whole of the Muslim world.

The Nadva library houses over 100000 books. Several research institutions set up by the Nadva promote ongoing research and publication. Its monthly and fortnightly journals are called *al-b'aas-al-islami* and *al-raid.* Its Urdu fortnightly is called *tameer-e-hayat.* The Majils-i-Tahqiqat-o-Nashriyat-i-Islam (The academy of Islamic research and Publication) is one particular institute which was started by Mawlana Syed 'Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi in 1959. This academy has so far produced over 200 works, some of which have been translated into many languages. The Nadva was instrumental in the genesis of the Majlis-i-Tahqiqat-i-Shariah (The Academy of Research in the Shari 'ah), which was set up to study, review, and adapt the Muslim Personal Law (part of the traditional Shari'ah law which addresses the family and inheritance of Muslims in India) and Islamic Shari'ah in general. This academy was founded over a decade ago under the leadership of Mawlana Syed 'Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi. The members of this academy are drawn from all over the vast country of India.

Through all of these additional efforts, the Nadva seeks to bridge the gap between the religious scholars (from the old school of thought) and modern Muslims. Its character is revolutionary in that it calls for reform of Islam recognizing the changing currents operating within Islam and in wider society.

5. Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband: Origins

Dar al-'Ulum is located at a small town called Deoband, approximately 5-6 hours drive from Delhi. It is the oldest (of the new type) and the best known of the Madrasas of India. Next to Al-Azhar in Cairo, Dar al-'Ulum is considered the most important centre of Islamic learning in the world. Majority of the independent Madrasas in India, as also in the other parts of South Asia, are modelled on it and follow the curriculum set by it. It has, since its origins in the 19th century played a significant role not just in training and equipping highly qualified leaders, but has played a central role in nation building, not least of which was the Indian freedom movement.

Mawlana Burhanuddin Qasmi's work[30] shows that Dar al-'Ulum represents the very quintessence of the perfect balance between the formal and spiritual currents within Islam. Its spiritual component is rooted in the legacy of a well-known Sufi reformer Shah Waliullah Dehlwi (1703-1762) and, hence, goes back over 100 years before its foundations were laid in Deoband. Shah Waliullah was ahead of his time. He led an intellectual campaign years before the 'first war of independence' and the 'Quit India Movement' and drew the attention of those who would hear him to the extensive moral and spiritual corruption of the company and the values of the West, the East India Company represented. His basis for the critique of the Company and its values essentially stemmed from the spiritual experience he is said to have had while on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The hallmark of his message was the commitment to establishing equality and justice in India – objects widely perceived to be lacking in British India then as also during the period when Dar al-'Ulum became a participant in the freedom movement. His son, Shah 'Abdul Aziz Dehlwi, continued his critique of the British rule at the beginning of the 19th century and began a long drawn Indian struggle for freedom in which the spiritually inclined 'Ulama' provided significant leadership. The 'Sepoy Mutiny' led to the death of over 50000 'Ulama', and in Delhi alone nearly 500 of them were hanged. So actively were these engaged in the freedom movement that the 'Ulama', known popularly as the *mawlwis*, became synonymous with the term 'rebel'.

---

[30] Burhanuddin Qasmi, *Darul Uloom Deoband: A Heroic Struggle against the British Tyranny*, Mumbai: Markazul Ma'arif, n.d.

It was in the aftermath of this tragic state of affairs (apparently, it took years for the 'Ulama' to recover from the shock of the policy of 'Ulama' hunting'), that the Dar al-'Ulum came into existence. The original objective of this institution was to establish a spiritual and intellectual base for revolution against what was generally perceived by this group of the elite as injustice, oppression, suppression of culture, knowledge, and endowments.

The early impetus for the establishment of this Madrasa was provided by a Sufi, Haji Muhammad Abid of Deoband. He was appointed as the honorary patron and manager of the Madrasa when it was first established. Maulana Muhammad Yaqub, a leading educationist, was the first headmaster of the Madrasa. Hazrat Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanatawi (1833-1879) and Hazrat Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi are recognized as the two principal founding fathers. The three components of the Madrasa's objective were: central role of religion in individual and social life, freedom from slavery within and without, simplicity, and hard work.[31]

The Dar al-'Ulum began small and in utter simplicity at an open mosque in Deoband on 30 May 1866. This was reminiscent of the earliest period of genesis of Islam in Madina. The first teacher to be appointed was a spiritual leader, Mullah Mahmud Deobandi. The school had a single student named Mahmud al-Hasan. This student who later came to be known as *shaykh al-hind* (leader of India) led a resistance movement that cut across the Hindu-Muslim divide. He formed a government in exile headquartered in Madina with Mahmud al-Hasan as its *amir* (chief), Barkutullah Bhopali as its minister, and Mahraja Pratap Singh as its President. This government in exile began then to seek international support against the British rule. One of the internal communications between these leaders was written on a silk cloth giving details of the conspiracy against the British. This letter fell into the hands of the British in 1916 and gave rise to the well-known *tahrik-e-reshmi rumal* (the silk kerchief conspiracy). Over 200 'Ulama' were arrested as a result (many of whom later released). Muslims, related to this Madarasa, continued to participate in various other movements led by the Indian National Congress (established in 1885), such as the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements.

---

[31] It is interesting to note how close Gandhi's own philosophy of life, in the early 20th century, involved some of these principal objectives.

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, a Muslim organization based in India, was started in 1919 by the 'Ulama' of this Madrasa. Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, a well-known freedom fighter and a product of Madrasa education, along with the Indian National Congress, played an important role in the freedom of India. This Madrasa inspired organization opposed the two nation theory of the Muslim league on grounds that culture, not religion, defines a nation's identity. A split occurred, however, in 1937, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam came into existence. After the partition it came to be in Pakistan. Though the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind claims to represent all Indian Muslims, majority of its members are from Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband.

This Dar al-'Ulum in Deoband is known today as 'the Al-Azhar' and 'the mother of all religious institutions' in India. It seeks to combine the divergent intellectual and spiritual streams within Islam with the selected items from the modern western system in order to equip generations of Muslim leaders in India.

6. System of Education

In reaction to the introduction and wholly uncritical adoption of modern western education, Dar al-'Ulum laid its special emphasis on traditional subjects. It, however, also absorbed some of the features from the modern institutions such as the division of students in classes, attendance registers, written examinations, etc. Its open attitude is attributable to the moderate foundations on which it is said to be based. Of these foundations, the following are significant: The knowledge of the *shari'ah* (law) and conformity to the *sunnat* (traditions),[32] the following of the Sufi path, the moderate vision of religious Law (Hanafi school),[33] and theology (Maturidi school).[34]

During the time of the Prophet, the primary 'text' of education was the Holy Qur'an (then, in its extant oral form). The sources of knowledge expanded to include the traditions of the Prophet during the period of the early Caliphate when the Qur'an also came to be written. To these were added the expanding science of jurisprudence and to some degree, also poetry as Muslim communities spilled beyond the confines of Arabia. 400 years on, newer subjects of learning were added which included the science of Qur'anic interpretation, principles of jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, lexicon, and history. With Islam's encounter with Greco-Persian cultures, newer sciences of medicine, astrology, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, etc., were also introduced. By the turn of the 11th century, scholastic theology and philosophical mysticism came to be firmly established as necessary components of Islamic education.

According to Maulana Hakim Sayyid Abdul-Hayy Lakhnavi, the education history of Islam can be divided into four distinct periods.

The first period begins roughly in the 12th century and ends in the 14th century. The following subjects were considered mandatory as part of Islamic learning: grammar, literature, philosophy-logic, jurisprudence, scholastic theology, Sufism, science of interpretation, and Hadith. The study of jurisprudence was considered the highest level of learning, since it was especially useful in sorting legal problems of the court and commoners alike. The second period begins from the late 14th century to the early 16th century. Apart from other sources, the study of the Hadith acquired a special place in the curricula during this period. The third period begins from the start of the Mughal era. During the reign of the Emperor Akbar, owing to the eclectic attitude of the Emperor, several newer additions were made to the syllabi. This period of eclecticism continued through to the time of the great reformer and mystic, Shah Waliullah of Delhi. Mughal Empire's special relations with Persia lent a Persian flavour to Indian culture and learning. Philosophy in particular of the mystical sort came to be recognized as the queen of sciences and was expressed through poetry.

---

[32] These traditions are understood in their broadest sense in order to include both the inner and external dimensions, a legacy of the high-mindedness of Sufi's brotherhoods.

[33] Four traditional schools of law are: Hanafi (eponymous founder, Abu Hanifa, c.700-767 from Iraq), Maliki (Malik Ibn Anas, c.715-795 from Medina), Shafi'i (Muhammad Ibn Idris ash-Shafi'I, 767-820), Hanbali (Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, 780-855). Both Moghul and Ottoman empires were officially subscribed to the liberal Hanafi school.

[34] Al-Maturidi followed the liberal Abu Hanifa's legacy in theology.

The fourth period began from the middle of the 18th century with the efforts of Mulla Nizamuddin Sahalvi, a contemporary of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. During the latter part of the Mughal era, the centre of learning and culture shifted from Delhi to Lucknow,[35] culminating in the liberal tradition of combining learning with Sufism of the 'Ulama' of the famous Farangi Mahal.[36] Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) is said to have visited Lucknow and ordered the construction of the mosque on Lakshaman Tila (a Hindu religious site).[37] Aurangzeb also transferred a complex of four buildings (originally belonging to a French [farangi] trader) called Farangi Mahal to Mullah Nizamuddin. Mullah Nizamuddin founded a famous school which produced several important scholars famously known as "the 'Ulama' of Farangi Mahal." The curriculum adopted by the school was named as 'Nizami's Syllabus' (*dars-e nizami*). The main feature of this curriculum was that it was rationalistic.

Dar al-'Ulum follows this syllabus in spirit, as it brings together the excellence of all of the previous centres of learning and their syllabi in addition to the changes demanded by the new situations and times; in this sense Dar al-'Ulum claims to be more comprehensive.

Its syllabus consists of four levels: primary, intermediate, graduate, and post-graduate. Primary to graduate level program is mandatory and takes 8 years to complete. The post-graduate program is not mandatory. It includes the biography of Muhammad, grammar, syntax, Arabic literature, chirography (writing and dictation), jurisprudence, logic, exegesis, Hadith (Traditions), ethics and moral law, general history, rhetoric, modern sciences, geography, systematic theology, history of India, and Urdu language. The optional post-graduate degree offers specialised training in the fields of the science of interpretation/hermeneutics, theology, jurisprudence, literature (Arabic/Persian/Urdu), teaching methods, calligraphy, journalism, computer science, English literature, and missions

---

[35] Lucknow (capital of Avadh) is known to have been an important centre of the Sultanate of Delhi in the 14-15th centuries and continued into the Mughal Empire from the early 16th century. With the decline of the Mughal Empire, a succession of 11 governors ruled over Avadh until 1858. The British took over the administration after Navab Wajid Ali Shah (1847-1856) in 1858.

[36] See F. Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

[37] Shaikh Pir Muhammad, a contemporary scholar and Sufi, lies buried here. During his stay here, he attracted large numbers of student and scholars from different part of the country. The school founded by him was an important centre of learning for about a century after his death in 1668/69.

8. Bridging the Chasms between Madrasas and Secular Institutions

Waris Mazhari, recently interviewed by Y. S. Sikand,[38] is perhaps the principal example of the highly educated Muslims of South Asia who, in themselves, bring together not just the Nadva and Deobandi systems but also span the supposed gulf between the so-called secular and traditional systems of education. His views are representative of the host of alumni of the Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband since the Urdu monthly *tarjuman al-Qur'an* he edits is an official organ of the Deoband Madrasa Old boys Association in Delhi.

The Deoband Madrasa Old boys Association is an apolitical organization of the graduates of Deoband concerned with Dar al-'Ulum's vision to Islamize the Muslim masses and promote harmony between the different factions within Islam and the wider society.[39] It aims to assist the Madrasas, on a continuing basis, in reforming the syllabus consonant with the changing times and needs.[40] Mazhari agrees that conservative 'Ulama' resist change largely on account of their respect for past authorities. He thinks of this as nothing short of 'the veneration of the elders'. This is precisely the reason why Muslims should not remain bound to the past authorities. He believes that the great majority of the 'Ulama', both in and outside the Deobandi Madrasa system, favour change and modernization without sacrificing the essentials of faith. He believes the major obstacle on the road to further change in Madrasas is not the resistance of some traditional 'Ulama', but rather the paucity of funds.[41]

In response to Y. S. Sikand's question on the role of Madrasas in aiding and abetting violence, Mazhar makes a distinction between the

---

[38] My source of the copy of Y. S. Sikand's interview with Waris Mazhari, 20th January, 2003 sent to me by the Interviewer; see the published version of Y. S. Sikand's interview in *Qalandar*, August 2003.

[39] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 1.

[40] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 2.

[41] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 7.

Madrasas of India and Pakistan. He believes some Madrasas of Pakistan do justify violence; although, this view does not appear to be entirely correct, he shows no awareness of the same happening in any of the Indian Madrasas. Consistent to the history of the Partition Movement, he believes that Dar al-'Ulum at Deoband, in particular, has been in the forefront of Indian nationalism and continues to remain bound by the vision of a pluralistic India. He believes that this philosophy characterizes the present Deoband Madrasa and the host of institutions inspired by it.[42]

9. Conclusion

Modernization is understood primarily in relation to the need for modern subjects in Madrasas – not just for their own sake, but also in order to further understand deeper implications of the Qur'an. A deeper study of history of the wider world, for instance, is one such area of improvement. Likewise, the study of social sciences, Hindi (national language of India), English (the language of the world), etc., is necessary in order that the graduates feel at home in the world they live in and interact with. At the primary and intermediate levels, the pupils need to be exposed to key subjects taught in the alternative systems of education.[43]

Modernization is also understood in terms of promoting employment-oriented programs. These are programs through which the pupils are given technical and professional training, along with religious, in order to enable them maintain themselves and their families. Some Madrasas, following Deoband and the Nadva, do teach computers, journalism, etc., and provide technical training in watch repairing, book binding, and calligraphy[44] in addition to requiring students to engage in social and community development related projects while in training.[45]

Though still a long way to go, the Madrasas instituted with a view to providing education to Muslims girls are beginning to make a significant impact among Muslim women.[46]

Mazhar also critiques the emphasis on rote learning in Madrasas. He believes that more changes need to be brought in to promote critical thinking, comprehension, and debate in addition to inducting and fully integrating the available modern teaching methods.[47]

---

[42] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 15.
[43] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 8.
[44] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 9.
[45] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 10.
[46] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 13.

Mazhar bemoans the fact that the ‘Ulama’ are not doing enough to promote inter-faith harmony in India. The challenge to preserve peace, however, is too great to be achieved simply by the ‘Ulama’ alone. He believes common Muslims need to participate in a wider Islamic movement for dialogue and peace.[48] Besides this, there is also a need to maintain peace between different sects within Islam. Dar al-‘Ulum, as the premier Muslim institution in India, he believes, will provide a strong leadership in these areas.[49]

Do we have hard evidence of Dar al-‘Ulum or the Nadva providing leadership in defusing Hindu-Muslim tensions, particularly during times of active violence? It is difficult to give any firm answer to this question, but one can take heart in the fact that Muslim leadership is rising to the occasion and is seeking to commit itself to the great Deobandi tradition of Indian nationalism, recognition of plurality, and pursuit of inter- and intra-religious peace. The leadership is also concerned about making its system of education relevant to modern times. We hope not just that this movement of change continues, but also that, in time, a host of Madrasas inspired by it follows suit.

---

[47] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 14.

[48] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 20.

[49] Interview with Waris Mazhari, *Qalandar* August 2003, Question 21.

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 153-162

A MAP FOR THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE OTHER

George Thadathil♦

1. Introduction

"The rituals you see enacted in the temples, such as Tanjore, were already being performed when the temples of ancient Greece and Rome where still in use; yet, while the Gods of Thebes and Parthenon have long been dead and forgotten for millennia, the Gods and temples of Hindu India are still as alive and active as ever. For Hindu civilization is the only great classical culture to survive from the ancient world intact and at temples, such as Tanjore, one can still catch glimpse of festivals seen by Greek or Egyptian ambassadors to India long before the rise of Rome."[1]

Philosophy has fallen asleep over the question 'What is Man?' a question which hopelessly confuses the empirical and the transcendental. "Man is a recent invention; and one perhaps nearing its end."[2]

The above two quotes capture the polarities operating in society between tradition and modernity. This study intends to enter into the discourse on religious literacy in society in the context of this polarity with special reference to Indian society. It will look at the current emergence of this discourse, its specific features in India by situating within the secularist discourse, and then propose a model that could be applicable even beyond the Indian horizons.

♦**George Thadathil** SDB, presently the Head of the Department of Philosophy and the Principal at Salesian College, Sonada, Darjeeling, holds a PhD from the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras (2000). Apart from two co-edited works, *Communities and Identity Consciousness: South Indian Trajectories* (2004) and *Cultural Identity in Nepali Language and Literature* (2005), he writes regularly in philosophical and theological journals in India.

[1] William Dalrymple, "Invoking Nataraja," *Seminar* 572 (April 2007), 14-17.

[2] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Rutledge, 1989, 387.

2. Why Religious Literacy

Religious literacy as a topic of discourse in the public mind emerged as a post 9/11 phenomenon, calling for the rethinking on the prevalent knowledge about the co-religionists in one's country. Literacy is carrying forward the thinking function. To be literate, whether in computer, media, literature, or religion, is a mode of increasing the social capital of a people or society. There is the concern of the policy maker as well as the social worker in rethinking the prevailing biases and working towards overcoming the prejudices that inhere in the public mind.

The concern to remould society differently, from how we find it, is a task equally before the philosopher as well as the political scientist. Therefore, it could be considered that "[t]hinking in the public interest is a social function which rests on two far reaching philosophical assumptions: in the first place, we thinkers are saying that reality is not as it is but as we conceive it to be. Secondly, we are saying that reality as we conceive it to be is a possible world, a world we human beings can choose to inhabit."[3]

What has brought to the public discourse a rethinking on the positioning of religion in public life is the consequence of the alternate mode of keeping religion at bay from public space. "The monopolizing of a society's mental power is as much of a threat to freedom as the monopolizing of its political or economic power."[4] If so, in succumbing to keep religion out of public discourse, was there an attempt to control the potential for imagining coexistence differently?

The secular thinking was built on the premise that it would be conducive to promoting harmonious coexistence in society. When the irreligiosity or anti-religiosity of the state-provided ideology of secularism, began to threaten the wellbeing of a sizeable part of the society whose religious beliefs received no recognition, and alternative models of wellbeing began to surface in society, the need for religious literacy too surfaced.

The presupposition here is that just like in an overtly religious society some mode of secular education and appreciation of the values of neutrality (understood as making space for multiple faiths) is needed, so too in an exaggeratedly secular society religious education becomes a necessity. In this argument, it is the concern with the health of the society that promotes the religious literacy. The health of the nation, as it is with that of an individual, is disrupted by forces of disease, either genetic or historical. Measures to counteract such forces, as prevention or relief medications or radical interventions, are indeed necessary for the preservation of the wellbeing of all.

---

[3] Philip Allot, *The Health of Nations: Society and Law beyond the State*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 5.

[4] Allot, *The Health of Nations*, 9.

The prevalent problems are, then, the consequences of having controlled the public mind in one way. Its solution calls for an adaptive reshaping of the public mind. One can see parallels to such a situation existing in the pre-industrial pre-French Revolution societies wherein the poor and their opinions were made subsidiary to the elite who thought and acted on their behalf. The assertion of J. S. Mill that 'the prospect of the future depends on the degree in which (the poor) can be made rational beings' rings a note that the future of contemporary society depends on making the public religiously literate. In other words, in the Gramscian sense of the word 'common sense', the popular culture is to be invested with an appreciation for the other in order to envision a new society. We shall return to this again.

Philip Allot mentions four ideological premises of the 19th century continuing into the 21st as (i) the great hegemony of the US and the EU lead in world affairs, (ii) the inter-state rivalry leading diplomacy as mainstay of the balance of power between nations, (iii) global capitalism with its social engineering of human effort as having no spatial limits and (iv) the science led social progress generating the momentum of science and technology. It is within these parameters of defining the changing patterns of evolving societies that the future possibilities are to be realistically worked out. The imaginary of a nation is conditioned equally by external factors as much as by internal, intrinsically inherent factors as well. Locating oneself within India, for instance, it could be posed as to what are the factors that prevent concerted political action to rectify the deficiencies of governance despite awareness of it even on a mass scale. One could think of the growing Maoist influence, for example, in the rural districts of Andhra Pradesh, Jharkand and Chattisgarh. There seems to be a collective internal disability to overcome problems through dedicated action, even when they are identified and analyzed to perfection.

3. The Secularist Option

The secular agenda for the country realizes itself in promoting a vibrant civil society that acts as a buffer between the traditional values embedded in the family and the modernity brought to the public sphere by means of globalised state and its governance. In searching for the right role of religion and, therefore, the need for religious literacy the emergence of society itself must be placed in context.

Secularism emerged in India as an Indian version of modernity. There was a traditional way in which communities accommodated one another and the society was termed 'tolerant'. Under the new circumstances of modernity, 'secularism' has replaced or has become the byword for tolerance in Indian society. It is that which keeps a society knit despite competing notions of good and interest. The mode of doing things in public in such a way that the competing and often irreconcilable conceptions of good did not vitiate situation of public interaction among people, but became in effect a secular ethic. What is feared is that due to the institutional entrenched percolation of religion in India as a colonial legacy carried over into post colonial times, mixing of religion and modernity would turn out to be a leviathan – an uncontrollable monster.

In any case, if this fear is to be overcome, religious literacy is a necessity in India: either to practise in such a way as to preserve the pre-modern basis of harmony or to recreate the harmony of the secular state by giving space to the competing voices of religion. The map to the other in the Indian socio-political context consists in delineating its historical development. The route to the other, be it Muslim, Sikh, or Christian is simultaneously an entry into the space of a community that is one's neighbour regionally and linguistically, besides religiously. In this connection, Javeed Alam has successfully shown that the emergence of the 'other' as different from one's own community is a phenomenon of the emergence of the elite in both Hindu and Muslim communities during the colonial period.[5]

In the Indian political discourse, secularism is the word for finding the place of the other. However, it is perceived differently. Alam refers to the history of India seen from Hindu perspective as radically different from the history of Pakistan seen by the scholars there, as if it means the

---

[5] Javeed Alam, *India: Living with Modernity*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, 215-226.

'twain shall never meet'. Building on the divergences in perception scholars have argued that the ideal of a 'secular state' is contrary to all known facts of Indian history. On the other hand, there is an attempt to reinvent the tradition of tolerance and coexistence as a practically lived experience in many parts of the country and theorize the unique potential of a 'secular' meaning of 'multi-religious' than anti-religious state functioning coherently for the general wellbeing. It is this experiment that is still on in the country and its success depends on a new kind of literacy being imparted to the upcoming generation. It ought to draw on the past to show the possibilities of collective existence in amity amidst differences.

The history of the emergence of society in postcolonial India offers the background to the discussions about the present demands for moulding society in one way or the other. In this regard, the distinctions made between 'population, political society, state and civil society' by Partha Chatterjee are useful clarifications. There is a role of educating the population in moving towards civil society through a process of politicization of society for the purpose of formation of the state.[6] The following distinctions he draws help understand the present state of Indian society: First, he observes that the site of significant transformation shifts from colonial period, civil society, to postcolonial period, the political society; second, the debate revolving around transformation in society shifts from 'modernity' in colonial period to 'democracy' in postcolonial period; third, that in the present phase of globalization of capital, there is an emerging opposition between modernity (civil society) and democracy (political society).

An example from contemporary Uttar Pradhesh (UP) politics clarifies this issue further. The political alliance between the Dalit Bahujan Samajwadi Party of Mayawati with the Brahminic forces in UP, through an alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), brought Mayawati to power. Reflecting on this development, Kanchah Ilaiah comments that while political power is shared easily by the Brahmin with the Dalit for survival, not so easily shared is the spiritual power. He poses a question to Mayawati as to whether her politics will also make the Brahmins share their spiritual power, by bringing about true spiritual democracy in Indian society, wherein anyone can share in the priest craft. In the Indian context, then, the role of religion ought to strengthen the democratic spirit in civil society as well as in state-based governance.

---

[6] Partha Chatterjee, "On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies," in Sunil Khilnani and Sudipta Kaviraj (eds.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 165-178.

This is all the more called for because there is a feeling that sense of the nation is weak in the public mind in India. The subsidiary or more closer affiliation to the states as sub-nations of ethnic communities, religions, linguistic, and regional self perceptions eats into the sense of the 'Indian' creating this weakening. This, however, is no deficiency as it goes hand in hand with an equally open internationalism in the emerging context, even as it did earlier. Both Gandhi and Tagore are characterized by this universalism. Standing in their shoes, it would seem that nationalism is a kind of inevitable evil of the contemporary times to be trodden over and bypassed. The resurgence of internationalism in Europe, thus, coincides with the reawakening of its hidden dimension of the Indian self-identity in the public mind. Religious conversion in India is a culturally embedded reality. The transformation in religious sensibility transmutes the culture as well. Conversion, as a religious act having a cultural impact and transformation potential, takes us back to the discourse on the Other.

4. The Route to the Other

Modernity is credited to have invented the Other. The arrival of modernity into Indian subcontinent can be qualified with the emergence of the Other in the modern sense. For instance, the modernist reading of the Indian caste-ridden society which Louis Dumont expertly accomplished in his classical anthropological work entitled *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966)[7] epitomised the Brahmin-Dalit antithesis on the basis of purity-pollution. Once the dynamic of the 'other' is perceived, it is easy to predate it to the pre-modern set up, and even to the ancient map. However, it is to be noted that it still remains as a modernist reading of the pre-modern times.

The Foucaultian stress on the changes in the episteme of an epoch or a period going into the making of a culture is significant. The relevance of both the structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to languages as the vehicles of these respective 'episteme' also is noteworthy. The shift, over the millennia, from Sanskrit to regional vernaculars and through them to international English is a marker of this cultural confluence of encounters with 'others'- be they next door neighbouring ethnic group or the intruding foreigner.

---

[7] Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988.

On closer analysis, the exclusionary dynamic which begins with the religion based enumeration of membership in the society is to be faulted for the construction of the 'other' as an outsider beyond the boundary – of the caste, region, culture, etc. Religions construct overarching meta-narratives and supposedly conceive it as if meant for all. The emergence of the outsider as the promoter of the alternative is incomprehensible. The vision of the self, as seen from the framework of the respective religion (or region, language) based affiliation of the community, is narrowly enclosed within its boundaries.

The emergence of the 'other' is thus the direct consequence of the inability to include the 'other' as part of the self-definition, the '*lokam*' (world) of oneself. What falls outside, is perceived as different, as incompatible and therefore becomes the *other*.

The dynamics of creating space for the 'other' rises from the inadequacies of the prevailing order: for example, "free representative institutions cannot be conceived within the framework of colonialism, freeing labour from the sway of capital for their self-realization is not possible under capitalism; equality of cultures is unthinkable under enlightenment rationality."[8] Here the roots of racism and exclusion of the other are inbuilt.

In sharp contrast, dialogue is a process of discovering the 'other' as constituting the self, the 'other' as created by the self and the 'other' as but one half of the self. This is seen in the non-violent resistance movements across the world. David Hardiman highlighted this in his study of Gandhi and the global impact of non-violence. The signs of this dialogue are visible in the wise words of Gandhi, "non-violence has not failed us but we have failed non-violence," or the words of Martin Luther King, "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."[9] Or again, as Nelson Mandela said, "Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished."[10] These words refer to the emergence of dialogue and positioning of the other with one's self perception that is the outcome of hard reality hitting in the face and no mere idealism. That is to say, "to make peace with an enemy one must work with that enemy and that enemy becomes your partner."[11]

---

[8] Alam, *India: Living with Modernity*, 12-13.

[9] Martin Luther King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 63, cited in David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005, 272.

The search for the face of the *other* is a search for an alternative. An alternative to the economic-political-social oppressive structure emerges from the discord experienced therein and its lack of encompassing all the experienced reality. Oppressive systemic structures are built on the exclusion of the 'other' in principle. Therefore, the alternative conception of the 'other' has to be built as a non-exclusionary dynamic. Such non-exclusionary approaches have been attempted in the history of thought and politics. Gandhi and his *ahimsa-satyagraha* or non-violence approach based on the merits of truth is one such. It has been in different degrees reworked by Martin Luther King, Malcom X, Nelson Mandela, Steve Bild, Medha Pathkar, Baba Amte, and Aung San Sui of Burma. Its power is gripping though opposition to it has been rampant.

Construction of the 'other' is part of the self-construction. The mode in which the *other* is constructed varies from West to East. The other is a regulatory, normative comparative reality for the West; for the very definition of self in the western – Cartesian-Kantian-Hegelian tradition is that the self is not the other; self is the non-other. In contrast, the *other* is cast as part of the self in the East, and yet distinct: the non-dual, the *ardhanariswara*; the meeting of opposites, a containment of the different. This syntegration attempt is found also in the West, as in the East, and it is to be construed as a middle path. The stress and emphasis vary, from east to west, giving different cultural-intellectual hypotheses.

Religious literacy is an absolute contemporary need due to various factors: neglect of one's tradition, growth of atheism, the science-religion debate, the plurality of religions, the consideration of religion from purely political or sociological or anthropological viewpoints, and the fact that religion was used to justify injustice, slavery, colonialism and genocide at various times in history in more than one culture.

---

[10] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 615, cited in David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 280.

[11] Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 280.

Against this background, religious literacy also got to do with supporting and preaching a religion that is liberal, just and promoting oneness of humanity.[12]

The need of the hour, it would seem, is the cross fertilization of cultures and it could be partly achieved by an introduction to the religious history of one's own religion and that of others. There is, however, inherent in this or any other mode of religious literacy campaign the danger of being subverted as propaganda for fundamentalist positions. This danger could somewhat be averted by means of presenting the negative impact of religious affinities on world history with the benefit religion and spirituality have brought to humanity.

In this regard, there is something more probably to be learned from Gandhi, one who experimented with religion and politics, quite successfully in the last century. When accused that his spirituality was overtaken by politics he responded disclaiming any sainthood:

> Though by disclaiming sainthood I disappoint the critic's expectations, I would have him to give up his regrets by answering that the politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine, and if I am to take part in politics it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries.[13]

His emphasis on two aspects is summed up by the grandson biographer: "One, he preserved his balance in the tempest of politics by holding tight to a firmly fastened religious bar or rail. Two, that a religious bar or rail was something moral and universal, transcending Hinduism."[14]

5. Conclusion

Religious literacy in the 21st century India means providing in all earnest a roadmap to the other: a journey of discovering the other in one's own tradition, language, religion, region, and culture. Dialogue, is the path that is chartered out by eminent personalities in each part of the country, be it Ramakrishna or Ramana Maharshi, Jyoti Rao Phule or Sri Narayana Guru, Gandhi or Ambedkar, Basava or Tagore. Religious literacy could or should provide the alphabets and accents for the conversations or dialogues among us to emerge. Our society needs probably to move in the direction of a post secular religiosity and a post religious secularity. We have ample models in our culture, pointing the way in this direction, and our tracing the path will be a contribution to posterity. It is important that we create an upcoming generation, in our schools, colleges, and universities who see "the social world as a place not primarily of struggle and conflict over control but as a context where conversation may be pursued with patience. And this is a deeply political matter … for it alters what we think we can expect of each other…"[15]

---

[12] See the responses to the work of Steven Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – and Doesn't*, SanFrancisco: HarperOne, 2007, in the comments that ensued after its release: reference.aol.com/nowyouknow/religious-literacy accessed on 2.08.08.

[13] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 246.

[14] Gandhi, *Mohandas*, 246.

---

[15] Rowan Williams, "What is a University?" *International Journal of Christian Higher Education* 12 (January-March 2007) 1, 20. The author is the archbishop of Canterbury and the quote is from a lecture given at WuHan University in China on 13 October 2006.

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 163-179

THE CATHOLIC MASS IN A SECULAR WORLD

Marco Ornelas♦

1. Introduction

This article forms a part of the research project "The Roman Missal as an Episodic Structure of Communications among Those Present." This research examines the use that is given to the protocol text of the Catholic Church for the performance of Mass, and has three objectives: (i) to give context to the publication of the missal in 1570 (Council of Trent), (ii) to describe the structure of worship (liturgy of the mass) incorporating the modifications made 400 years later during the Vatican Council II (1962-1965), and (iii) to outline the importance of rhetoric and of sacred oratory for the homily or sermon.

What follows is the main part of this research, that which describes the structure of the cult or the liturgy of the Mass. To start with it is necessary to establish the theoretical parameters that make it possible to study the Catholic Mass as a system of religious communications. A new analytical perspective is used to reflect the general theory of social systems and sociology of religion developed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. The first section of this article establishes the theory used to interpret the Catholic Mass. It also includes a reflection on the place of the Mass in the light of a contemporary secular world.

The second section deals with general aspects of the liturgy and of the book which contains the detailed format for its celebration: The Roman Missal. The third section deals with the main non-Orthodox oriental liturgies and the theological options that differentiate them. Finally, the last section describes and compares between the Tridentine and the Pauline Masses. The creed is one of the elements of the Latin Rite that stands out as strongly dogmatized; in comparison with the Oriental churches, there are also remarkable differences in the Eucharist sacrifice, in particular in

---

♦**Marco Ornelas**, a lecturer in Sociology at the Universidad del Mar-Campus Huatulco in Oaxaca, Mexico, holds an M.Sc. in Information Management from the University of Sheffield (UK).

the form of the Eucharistic Prayer and in the participation of the assemblies during the celebration of Eucharist.

2. Theoretical Considerations: A New Perspective on Secularism

According to the theoretical frame of reference used in this research, religions are communications systems. So, the Catholic Mass represents both a system of interaction and the symbiotic symbol of Catholic communications.[1] What is a system of interaction? It refers to a particular way in which communications re-produce: through bodily co-presence, that is to say, of "those who are present." What is a symbiotic symbol? Symbiotic symbols determine the ways in which communications may be interfered or "irritated" by the bodies.[2] Examples of these are sensorial perception for scientific communications, physical restraint for political communications, sexuality for communications of intimacy, bodily wants for economic communications, and ritual for religious communications.

The Latin rite of the mass, then, may be defined as a particular blend of rites and dogmas – the two communication forms that shape religions – that requires the permanent iteration under conditions of bodily co-presence, in order to interpenetrate human beings with Catholic communications. In much the same manner, a sweat lodge or "*Temazcal*" interpenetrates the organic/conscious faculties of individuals with Native American religious communications; "*japa*" (the practice of *mantra* repetition) interpenetrates human beings with Shaivite communications, and meditation interpenetrates human beings with Buddhist communications.

The rites and dogmas that constitute the Catholic Mass accomplish the social function attributed by this theory to religions in general: to achieve successful communication or, simply, to circumscribe or guide expectations.[3] In particular, the communicative form of the ritual shows a remarkable resemblance to the communicative form of societies with rhetorical primacy: they both overflow with expressivity (complicated ritual/rhetorical forms) even though they convey very little or no information.[4] It should be noted that the homily or sermon is the moment in Mass where prevailing communicative expectations are created (related to a particular moment and communicative circumstance). The sermon will achieve this by means of the technical-communicative device specific for speech, i.e., rhetoric.

---

[1] Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems: Outline for a General Theory*, Spain: Anthropos/UIA/CEJA, 1998, 199 ff., 363 ff.

[2] Niklas Luhmann, *Society of Society*, México: Herder/UIA, 2007, 295.

[3] Luhmann, *Society of Society*, 181-182.

[4] Niklas Luhmann, *Religion of Society*, Madrid: Trotta, 2007, 165-166; Alfonso Mendiola, *Communication, Rhetoric and Reality: The Rhetorical Construction of*

The Catholic Mass that is observed today is a highly dogmatized ritual. The Catholic Mass finds increasing difficulties in reinforcing face-to-face or interactive situations because the elements that shape it are strongly dogmatized (this means that they force specific meanings/interpretations not linked to immediate interactive situations). This is called religious de-socialization.[5] Perhaps, the original social function of the ritual may nowadays be observed only among some aboriginal tribes in Australia, Africa, or the Amazon jungle, and no longer among people who attend Sunday Mass in one of the many Catholic churches that exist in any city around the world.

The problem of secularism is understood in this theory as the relation of religion to the forms of social differentiation, and not so much as the diminishing importance of religion in today's contemporary world. What matters, then, are the ways in which religious communications work under the different types of societies observed throughout history.[6] Secularism presupposes the communicative differentiation of society which would allow, from the point of view of religion, to consider modern society as a society of sinners or at best as a "secularized" society.[7] It is relevant for the theory to provide explanations on the functioning of religion in stratified societies, and on the change in the operation of religious communications under conditions of functional differentiation (so-called modern societies) in the places of the world where this has happened.

A fine indicator of secularism is the strong individualism that widens the possibilities of religious choice in such a way that membership is no longer a lifetime decision, but is confined to a series of decisions of

---

Battles in the Chronicles of Conquest, México: UIA, El mundo sobre el papel, 2003, 189, 232.

[5] Niklas Luhmann, *Sociology of Religion*, México: Unpublished Manuscript, 2005, 49. This manuscript is integrated by Luhmann's two lengthiest articles on sociology of religion prior to the publication of his posthumous monograph *Religion of Society*. These are, *Religious Dogmatics and the Evolution of Societies* and *Differentiation Process of Religion*.

[6] Luhmann, *Religion of Society*, 241 ff.

[7] Luhmann, *Sociology of Religion*, 118.

variable length. What is witnessed today is a membership *à la carte*. Conversions are no longer "a great and astonishing event as with Saul/Paul, an outside event that conditions entirely the vital situation; therefore, it is no longer a kind of transcendental brain wash, but an individual decision to trust in a particular offer."[8] In this process the technical devices for the dissemination of communication have played a central role, first due to the printing press, followed by the newspapers, and, finally, by the so-called mass media.

These technical devices turn what is current into a new, and in this way current events become distant from the past. Continual re-enactments will be necessary to prevent past events from turning only into memories. An example of such re-enactment is the Catholic Mass, which is symbolized as present and not just remembered. The ritual demands communications under conditions of co-presence: it turns out to be a system of interaction as well as a symbiotic symbol.[9]

If the question on the meaning of secularism was raised once again, the answer would be: secularism is "a deficient and fleeting (?) adaptation to the conditions of modern society."[10] Another way of putting it is that the rules of social inclusion were modified when stratified societies turned into modern societies. In this change, the place of religion has been modified. While pre-modern societies, strongly hierarchical in their character, provided individuals with fixed places through the differentiation of households according to rank or depending on the distinction in terms of town or countryside, inclusion in modern societies depends entirely on the functional systems (by which is meant systems of communications: politics, economics, education, art, science, etc.). This inclusion/exclusion which depends no longer on religious communications, under modern circumstances intertwines with social organization with devastating results:

> Those who do not have documents find no jobs; those who have to live in the streets can not enrol in school (I was told in Bombay). There are very few possibilities to enter reputable careers or to have access to better jobs without schooling. There is a small possibility for food if there is not any income at all, and therefore a lack of

---

[8] Luhmann, *Religion of Society*, 256.

[9] Luhmann, *Sociology of Religion*, 108.

[10] Luhmann, *Religion of Society*, 260.

> energy for a normal work. The illiterate have almost no real possibilities to exercise their right to vote, etc.[11]

In modern societies, that is, under conditions of functional differentiation, Durkheim's classical theory on the "integrating" social function of religion would have to be put upside down.

In all, where does religion stand? It seems clear that in modern society Catholicism turned from an inclusive religion (everybody belonged to it since birth) into one religion in the midst of many other religions. The traditional and feared exclusion (excommunication) has no real consequences in a modern setting. If "secularism" meant once the harm done to religion by the increasing non-religious orientations of modern society, nowadays, and from the viewpoint of culture, means that all religions are subjected to a permanent comparison with one another, and that it is impossible to anchor the point of view where comparisons are made from. This means that the communicative possibilities of religion must be circumscribed by the communicative possibilities of modern society.

Nevertheless, what is truly important is that there is no significant connection between the exclusions of other social systems and religion: "the almost total exclusions of other functional systems – lack of money, of schooling, of documents; almost no possibility to be considered seriously by the police, or of making oneself heard in court – could be plainly ignored by religion."[12] Thus, here stands the case for religious communications.

3. The Liturgy and the Missal

The word liturgy derives from the Greek *leitourgia*, which means a general service of a public nature and, by extension, the public service offered in temples.[13] The word has two meanings which are important to distinguish. It means the set of rituals, ceremonies, sacraments and prayers of a church; thus, one may refer to the Roman liturgy, the Antiochene liturgy, or the Byzantine liturgy. The word liturgy also means, especially among the churches of the East, the Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist, that is, what in western Catholicism is called the Mass. While it is possible to refer to the

---

[11] Luhmann, *Religion of Society*, 262.

[12] Luhmann, *Religion of Society*, 263.

[13] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, CD-ROM, Classic 1914 Edition, 2003, s.v. "Liturgy" by Adrian Fortescue.

Catholic Mass as "liturgy," it is incorrect to call the Eucharist ritual of the eastern churches "mass."

Central to the Mass is the recreation of Christ's words during the Last Supper. Bread and wine were taken to the priest who in solemn attitude took them, repeated the words of Jesus and handed them out among those who received the Holy Communion. What Jesus said in the Last Supper can be found in Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:17-20, or in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. Jesus took the bread and blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take and eat all of you, for this is my body." Then, he took the chalice and blessed it again and gave it to his disciples, saying: "This is my blood, of the eternal covenant, which is being shed for you." Of those who witnessed these words only Luke reproduced the command: "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). The rite was a continuation of the Jewish domestic liturgy. It could be said that "the common meal of the first Christians imitated the last gesture of Christ: it was at once a memorial of the Supper and the ritual repetition of the voluntary sacrifice of the Redeemer."[14]

The Mass generally took place at the end of the service offered by synagogues, where psalms were read and prayers and instruction to the faithful were performed. In this sense, the Mass was in its origins "the Christianized service of the synagogues."[15] Centuries later this would be known as the liturgy or Mass of the Catechumens. This was followed by the Eucharist in which only the baptized may participate. Two elements of the service disappeared during the second century A.D.: the feast or *agape* before the Eucharist, and the spiritual exercises in which the faithful "were moved by the Holy Ghost to prophesy, speak in diverse tongues, heal the sick by prayer, and so on."[16] Nevertheless, the other two elements of the Mass – instruction and Holy Communion – subsisted in practically all rites.

Justin Martyr (100-165), in his *First Apology*, gives the first true account of the Mass as he witnessed it in Rome.[17] However, the book *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* still contains clear resemblances to the

---

[14] Mircea Eliade, *History of Religious Beliefs and Ideas*, Barcelona: Paidós Orientalia, 1988, 2: 400-401.

[15] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Liturgy" by Adrian Fortescue.

[16] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Liturgy" by Adrian Fortescue.

[17] Lucien Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, Spain: Ediciones Paulinas, 1990, 74.

Jewish forms of blessing bread and wine on the Sabbath.[18] The Lord's Prayer was already a recognizable prayer. The Eucharist was celebrated with the parting of bread and giving thanks, and only those who were baptized were allowed to take part. Also the *Eighth Book of the Apostolic Constitutions* gives information on the early liturgy, though written in Syria much later, around the fifth century. In it, the Eucharistic Prayer begins with the dialogue: "Lift up your hearts…" The *Eighth Book of the Apostolic Constitutions* shows parallelisms with the *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, written at the end of the first century, where the Sanctus follows the prayer. This circumstance has led to the supposition that the former is a copy of the latter. What is more plausible, in fact, is that the different liturgies gradually took shape in a rite with common features. Justin Martyr's account of the service is as follows:

1	Lessons	6	Thanksgiving prayer by the bishop
2	Sermon by the bishop	7	Consecration by the words of institution
3	Prayers for all people	8	Intercession for the people
4	Kiss of peace	9	The people end this prayer with Amen
5	Offertory of bread and wine	10	Communion

The Eucharist Prayer was the most important part of Eucharist. In the third century, this prayer contained the following elements: thanksgiving prayer (*eucharistía* in Greek); "remembrance of the words with which Jesus instituted the Supper before his being captured and sent to his ordeal; offering of bread and wine given by the chosen people to their God; and the petition to send the Holy Spirit over the elements and over the faithful."[19] From the fourth century onwards the knowledge of the liturgies grew notably. The plurality of rites since then can be grouped into four: the liturgy of Antioch, the liturgy of Alexandria, the liturgy of Rome and the liturgy of Gaul.[20] The first three cases correspond to the old patriarchal cities, while Gaul and north-western Europe, despite being part of the Roman Patriarchate, maintained their own liturgy until the eighth century.

---

[18] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Liturgy" by Adrian Fortescue.

[19] Étienne Trocmé, "Christianity from the Origins to the Council of Nicaea," *History of Religions*, 5:223-444, México: Siglo 21, 1979, 342-343.

[20] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Liturgy" by Adrian Fortescue.

The aforementioned *Eighth Book of the Apostolic Constitutions* belongs to the Antiochean liturgy, of which Jerusalem is a part. It seems necessary, thus, to connect the Roman liturgy with the Antiochene, and to recognize that the latter is closer to the original.[21] Besides, the old Roman liturgy – represented by the oldest sacramentaries: Leonine, Gelasian and Gregorian – is not the one used today, since the Roman Missal has received substantial additions from Gallican sources. Suffice to say that the original liturgy was much more simple and austere, bereft of any but the most basic actions. These modifications – "complication" of the liturgy – as this study strives to demonstrate, were not just the result of the Gallican influence or of chance, but find an explanation in the process of religious generalization experienced in the West, and which supposed, among other things, the reaffirmation of ritual identity in the East,[22] and the dogmatization of the Roman ritual, as has been clearly shown by the creed formula.[23]

The Roman Missal is the book used by the Catholic Church for the celebration of Mass in the Latin Rite. The book is basically divided into two parts of different sizes: the "Ordinary of the Mass," located for convenience near the centre of the volume, which contains the liturgy used throughout the year, and the rest of the book, its major part, which contains the fragments of the liturgy that vary day by day depending on the festivities ("Proper of Saints"), on the season ("Proper of Time": Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter), and on the motives for Mass celebration (common, ritual, for diverse needs, votive and for the dead).[24]

The Roman Missal that is used today is a mixture of various ceremonial books. In the past, the book used by the priest at the altar did not have more than what was needed for him to say. This book was known as Sacramentary (*sacramentarium*), as its contents were centred on the consecration of the sacrifice.[25] Other portions of the service (Introit, Gradual, Offertory, and Communion) which were chanted by the chorus were contained in another book, the "*Antiphonarium Missae*" or

---

[21] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Liturgy" by Adrian Fortescue.

[22] Jules Leroy, "Non-Orthodox Eastern Churches," *History of Religions*, 7:205-252, México: Siglo 21, 1981.

[23] Marco Ornelas, "Testing Luhmann's Hypothesis: Heresies and Religious Generalization in Western Christianity" Unpublished Manuscript, 2006.

[24] *Roman Missal*, 14th edition, México: Obra Nacional de la Buena Prensa, 2005, 271-410.

[25] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Missal" by Herbert Thurston.

"*Graduale*." Also the passages read by deacons (the Epistle, the Gospel, lessons from the Old Testament on special occasions) could be found in the "*Epistolarium*" or "*Apostolus*" in the "*Evangelarium*" and other lectionaries. Apart from these books, an "*Ordo*" or "*Directorium*" was needed to decide on the appropriate Mass. "Only by a slow process of development were the contents of the sacramentary, the gradual, the various lectionaries, and the 'Ordo' amalgamated so that all that was needed for the celebration of Mass was to be found within the covers of one volume."[26]

The first step in this development seems to have been the introduction of small books, named "*Libelli Missae*," for the celebration of devotional private Masses. These booklets contained one to three full Masses. Since these Masses were private services, they were celebrated by just one priest without the participation of the chorus or other ministers.[27] A typical example of these books, a liturgical treasure in itself, is the Irish Stowe Missal. The first *sacramentaries*, which were already adaptations in the sense of the "*Libelli Missae*," cannot be found before the ninth century. It is not until the second half of the thirteenth century that missals according to the modern type could be found. The first printed missals appeared from the end of the fifteenth century; the first printed Roman Missal dates back to 1474 and was printed in Milan.

4. The Oriental Non-Orthodox Liturgies

By the sixth century, hierarchical Christian communities appeared in the East, which were separated both from the Orthodox and the Roman church.[28] Until then, the church knew no divisions besides the one established through the provinces and ecclesiastical dioceses grouped in patriarchates: Rome in the West, and Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Constantinople in the East. The characteristic pluralism of eastern Christianity has its origin in theological controversies of the fifth century. The problem unresolved by the Council of Nicaea (325) concerned the relationship between the two natures of Christ, human and divine. In this respect three possibilities appeared. Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, gave Christ two natures (*biphysite* doctrine), so independent of each other that the properties of one could not be shared with the other. This thesis was condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431), which adopted the stand of the patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril, according to which Christ had only one nature (*monophysite* doctrine): his two natures constituted one true unity in only one Christ. This opinion was later modified by Pope Leo of Rome and was the basis of the decision taken at the Council of Chalcedon (451): "Christ has two natures without confusion or change, without separation or division. Union does not suppress differences between the two natures, but on the contrary, the properties of both natures remain untouched, and are found in one person (*prosôpon*) or hypothesis."[29]

---

[26] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Missal" by Herbert Thurston.

[27] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Missal" by Herbert Thurston.

[28] Jules Leroy, "Non-Orthodox Eastern Churches," *History of Religions*, 7:205-252, México: Siglo 21, 1981.

Contemporary eastern churches still reflect these theological postures. Those who accepted the doctrine of Chalcedon constitute the Melchite church; those who accepted the biphysite doctrine are the Nestorian church; and monophysites are dispersed among many churches: Syro-Jacobite, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopic.

> From a theological point of view, this division was more of form than of substance. Since it happened in times when terminology was not yet defined, more than an opposition of concepts it manifests confusion, and recent studies have demonstrated that what some called 'nature' did not differ much from what others called 'person' or 'hypothesis' and the other way round. Common goodwill could have solved this confusion of vocabulary, if political passions had not interfered and exploited this religious misunderstanding. When historical facts previous to the emergence of the churches of the East are analyzed, one could very well conclude that, behind theological opposition, another opposition was hidden: that against the authority of the Emperor.[30]

The first schism of Christianity, the rupture between the churches of the East and the West, has been treated elsewhere[31] and dates back to the eleventh century. If it is true that Byzantium was one of the main patriarchates of Christianity, it is also true that all other eastern churches maintained their organizational and ritual independence. Nevertheless, the separation of all these churches from the Byzantine orthodoxy is not so profound with regard to practice and general faith. All are hierarchical churches and recognize a supreme authority, upon which bishops, priests and laymen depend. Monks are of prime importance because bishops are chosen from among them. Bishops practice celibacy (though ordinary priests do not). All these communities recognize a variable number of sacraments.

---

[29] Leroy, "Non-Orthodox Eastern Churches," 206.

[30] Leroy, "Non-Orthodox Eastern Churches," 207.

[31] Ornelas, "Testing Luhmann's Hypothesis: Heresies and Religious Generalization in Western Christianity."

> Only on one point are they sensitive: on the use of their own liturgies, always reticent with regard to new ceremonies or prayers, since communities consider the defence of their ritual heritage as a symbol and a means of maintaining internal unity. These liturgies are so important to them because they define their personality: one could talk without differentiation of the Coptic Church or the Coptic Rite, of the Armenian Church or the Armenian Rite, to designate one and the same reality.[32]

All these churches have a strong ethnic character. Since these countries had been invaded by Muslims, they have strongly affirmed their cohesion, as they feared being absorbed. The patriarchs became also political leaders. These communities have developed their own tribunals, and even now its sentences are in many cases recognized by the civil authorities.[33] Since these churches distanced themselves from Byzantine orthodoxy, they also became separated from Rome. The Roman church has tried several times to attract them, and when it has been successful, for example at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39), the union did not last for long. Nevertheless since the sixteenth century the Roman church has established alliances with dissident groups, and has supported the creation of new churches united to Rome, called *uniatas*.

5. The Latin Liturgy: Tridentine and Pauline Masses

A comparison between the Tridentine Mass and the Pauline Mass brings out the following points of interest:

1. The most important modification of the missal, 400 years after the standardization of the cult being decreed as a reaction of ecclesiastical orthodoxy to Protestantism,[34] was ordered during the Vatican Council II. The modifications were not significant as far as the central elements of the ritual are concerned, but they did open up possibilities of participation to

---

[32] Leroy, "Non-Orthodox Eastern Churches," 208-209.

[33] Leroy, "Non-Orthodox Eastern Churches," 209 ff.

[34] Marco Ornelas, "Communicative Background to the Publication of the Roman Missal," Unpublished Manuscript, 2006.

the assembly, such as the change regarding the orientation of the priest (i.e., he now faces the faithful), the authorization of the use of vernaculars, and, in general, the clarification of the Ordinary of the Mass in such a way that the "devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved."[35] Nevertheless, and in accordance with the possibilities opened by communications, there are traditional Catholic groups opposed to these changes. These groups were initially led by the French archbishop Marcel Lefevre, who considered that modifications to the Mass format represent, "both as a whole and in its details, a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was formulated in Session 22 of the Council of Trent."[36] The Congregation for Divine Worship allowed these groups to celebrate Tridentine Masses in 1984, and a few years later, in 1988, John Paul II granted them permission to practice the Tridentine form of the Roman rite.

The Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul VI that promulgated the new missal established that the main modification affected the Eucharist prayer; rites were simplified and the homily enhanced. The lectionary was re-structured and distributed in a three year cycle (psalm 43 [42] and the Last Gospel disappeared as permanent fixtures). Also, sections relating to the Proper of Seasons, the Proper and Common of Saints, ritual Masses and Votive Masses were modified.[37]

2. As one can see, the Mass is divided into two parts: "first, the celebration of the Word – these are the readings of every Mass; then follows the celebration of Jesus' sacrifice, that is, the memorial of his death and resurrection, and the re-enactment of the Last Supper through the offering of bread and wine."[38] The part related to the Word corresponds to the Mass of the Catechumen in the Tridentine Mass, and to the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word in the Pauline Mass; the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice corresponds to the Mass of the Faithful in the Tridentine Mass, and to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rite in the Pauline Mass.

---

[35] "Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul VI," *Roman Missal*, 14th edition, 16*.

[36] "Tridentine Mass," *Wikipedia* (2006 Edition), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tridentine_Mass#Footnotes (11/14/2006).

[37] *Roman Missal*, 14th edition, 16* ff.

[38] Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, 11.

Tridentine Mass 1570 (Sacred Texts, 2006: Latin Mass; Fortescue, CE, 2003: Liturgy of the Mass)	**Pauline Mass 1970** (*Misal Romano*, 2005: 271-410)
The Mass of the Catechumens Sign of the Cross Psalm 43 (42) Confession/Confiteor (I confess to Almighty God…) Introit (usually from a psalm) Kyrie (Lord, have mercy…) *Gloria in excelsis Deo* ("Glory to God in the highest…") Epistle (from St. Paul's epistles) Gospel Sermon Nicene Creed	***Introductory Rites*** Greeting Act of penitence/*Confiteor* *Kyrie* *Gloria in excelsis Deo* ***The Liturgy of the Word*** Psalm/Acts of the Apostles Gospel Sermon Nicene Creed
Mass of the Faithful Offering of bread and wine Holy Trinity Prayer Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts…) Intercessions Consecration/ Transubstantiation (Luke 22:19-20) Lord's Prayer Breaking of the Host The Peace *Agnus Dei* ("Lamb of God…") Communion Final prayer and dismissal (*Ite Missa est*) The Last Gospel (usually John 1:1-14)	***The Liturgy of the Eucharist*** Offering of bread and wine Sanctus Eucharist Prayer Intercessions Consecration Lord's Prayer The Peace Breaking of the Host *Agnus Dei* Communion ***Concluding Rite*** Blessing and dismissal

3. It is interesting to note the persistence of the sermon, which in both masses precedes the profession of faith. It is important because "actually, for most of the faithful, the *Lectionary* constitutes their only bible; and the homily their only explanation and updating of God's Word."[39] As has been said before, this updating of God's Word through the sermon will be

---

[39] Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, 50.

achieved by means of the technical-communicative device specific for speech, i.e., rhetoric.

4. As regards the Creed, a central element, where the increasing dogmatization of the ritual may be observed:

> The Roman ritual used three creed formulae: the symbol of the apostles, the symbol of St. Anastasius (which was removed from the Divine Office in 1955), and the Nicaea-Constantinople symbol, that adds to the apostles' symbol the statements decided in the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381)... The Nicaea-Constantinople formulae helped to mend the christological errors, i.e., the statements on Christ which do not entirely acknowledge that he is both God and human being.[40]

More precisely, the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea decided in favour of Christ's divinity (*homoousios*) and fixed the date for Easter against those who made it coincide with the Jewish celebrations. Later on, the second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople) found against those who questioned the divinity of the Holy Ghost. This council was responsible for the addition of the phrases of the creed "which refer to the Holy Ghost (*qui simul adoratur*) and the rest that follows until the end."[41]

5. Some differences between the eastern and western traditions related to the Liturgy of the Eucharist can also be noted. "According to the eastern tradition, it is the *epiklesis* (the invocation of the Holy Ghost) that consecrates the bread and wine in the body and blood of the resurrected Christ. According to the western tradition, the words of Institution are responsible for such consecration."[42] There are also differences related to the participation of the assembly during the consecration.

Since the beginning of the third century there already existed a double tradition in the liturgical milieu of Syria: the one that put emphasis on the formula of cult, and which gave great importance to the words of Institution, and another one from eastern Syria, which stressed the

---

[40] Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, 52.

[41] *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Ecumenical Councils" by J. Wilhelm. The creed says: "[I believe in the Holy Ghost]... Who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified: Who spoke through the Prophets. And in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen." *Roman Missal*, 14th Edition, 288-289.

[42] Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, 95.

epiklesis and did not use the words of Institution at all. An example of the latter is the *Anaphora* (name given by the churches of the East to the Eucharist Prayer) of Addai and Mari. To this prayer, "'to do' is more important than 'to say'. This teaching is always valuable. A community is of the 'Eucharist' type, not because it says it celebrates the Eucharist, but because it enacts it."[43] Also among eastern churches the Lord's Prayer has always been recited by all the community; nevertheless, by the end of the sixth century in Rome the Lord's Prayer was an exclusively presidential prayer, recited only by the priest.[44]

The discussion of the moment in which the consecration takes place, and the different ways in which these two traditions participate in the Eucharist only confirms the diverse meanings given to cult celebration: one reinforces the dignity and authority of the faithful, and favours their in-depth religious experience (i.e., the one from eastern Syria), while the other subordinates it to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the end, one is interested in re-creating the Last Supper, while the other one is only interested in representing it or externalizing it by means of strict protocol formulae. This is a consequence of religious generalization in the Eucharist Prayer. The sound impulse of religious generalization finally prevailed and was the predominant trend in western Christianity.[45]

6. Conclusion

The Latin rite of the mass may be defined as a particular blend of rites and dogmas that requires the permanent iteration under conditions of bodily co-presence, in order to interpenetrate human beings with Catholic communications. The rites and dogmas that constitute the Catholic Mass accomplish the social function attributed to religions in general: to achieve successful communication or, simply, to circumscribe or guide expectations.

Secularism is understood as the relation of religion to different types of societies, and not so much as the diminishing importance of religion in today's contemporary world. A fine indicator of secularism is the strong individualism that widens the possibilities of religious choice. Catholicism turned from an inclusive religion (everybody belonged to it since birth), into one religion in the midst of many other religions. The traditional and feared exclusion (excommunication) has no real consequences in a modern setting. There is not any significant connection between the exclusions of other social systems (lack of income, education, political influence) and religion, and here stands the case for religious communications in the contemporary world.

---

[43] Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, 101 ff.

[44] Deiss, *The Mass: Its Celebration Explained*, 113.

[45] Ornelas, "Testing Luhmann's Hypothesis: Heresies and Religious Generalization in Western Christianity."

The Catholic Mass remains a ritual, one which has been subjected to a strong dogmatization process. This means that many of its constituent elements find their meaning in diverse historical situations which have become outdated. The typical example is the Nicene Creed in which many dogmas have been inserted, such as the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son (the divinity of Christ) and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Furthermore, the standardization of the format for the celebration of the Mass must be taken into account, the background of which is found in the response of ecclesiastical orthodoxy to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

In its original form, the celebration of the Mass was but the Christianization of the synagogue service. The different parts of the Mass were basically the lessons and the sermon which explained and updated the teachings, and the commemoration of the Last Supper. The Eucharist sacrifice was made of the offering, the Eucharist Prayer and the communion.

As has been noted, the creed is the element of the Mass where the effects of the increasing dogmatization of the ritual are observed, though, in fact, the Eucharist Prayer had been subjected to a semantic fixing in the part which corresponds to the words of Institution, which is the moment, according to the Latin ritual, when transubstantiation happens, that is, when the bread and wine transform into the body and blood of Christ.

The relevance given to the ritual diversity observed in the churches of the East, a process which began by the sixth century, helps to confirm, comparatively speaking, the importance and intensity of the process of religious generalization which took place in western Christianity, and was expressed in a hierarchical structure, dogma construction and sacramental action sanctioned by Rome. The process of religious generalization developed in parallel with a change in the form of social differentiation: the change to the modern or functionally differentiated society.

Finally, it should be noted that the Latin liturgy, regardless of the changes decided by the Vatican Council II, keeps homogeneity in substance, even though there subsist traditional Catholic groups that consider that these changes were not in line with the liturgical guidelines set out at Trent. It should be granted that this is partly true, in special, with regard to the possibilities of participation opened with the use of vernaculars. But the truth is that real differences do exist among the Eastern Rites, who consider that consecration happens at the time of the invocation of the Holy Ghost (*epiklesis*), and one can even find a Eucharist Prayer without the words of Institution, as is the case of the Syriac Anaphora of Addai and Mari. Also, the Latin liturgy stresses the authority and participation of those who preside over the assemblies (i.e., the priests); on the contrary, Eastern liturgies allow the open participation of the faithful.

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 181-190

A VISION OF UNITY
Outlines of a Holistic Worldview

Dylan Esler

1. Introduction

Science and religion, from a commonsense point of view, are divided by what seems to be an unbridgeable gulf, the one dealing with matter and the other with the invisible world of the spirit. This assumption, however, rests on a fundamentally distorted conception of reality. For reality is not to be split into distinct entities, which can be neatly separated from each other, as the static conception of the world would have us believe. What we call 'matter' and 'spirit' are by no means discreet entities, but different facets of one whole, or, in other words, different levels of vibrations in the endless energetic fluctuations of Being.

'Being' is a whole which is in constant change and flux. Any attempt to divide this whole is a more or less conscious violation of truth (truth as the correct, namely holistic, perception of reality), which stems from the inability to accept reality as it is. From this results existential insecurity, which manifests in frantic attempts to construct conceptual models. Through these we try to capture glimpses of an essentially dynamic process into rigid positions that we can analyse according to our prejudices.

It is not, however, that these models are necessarily wrong. The problem lies in mistaking these models for truth itself, when in reality they only provide us with a particular glimpse of truth. Thus, we become enslaved by what should be but useful tools. As the Buddhist parable goes, after crossing the river we carry the raft which took us to the other shore on our shoulders.[1] We end up being burdened by what might have originally been a useful asset! In this way we end up worshiping the models which we created to understand reality, thereby becoming idolaters, instead of using them as windows open onto reality.

2. Dynamics of Our Times

The times in which we live are particularly ripe: the possibilities of spiritual elevation are great, indeed, for those who truly *wake up*, but so is the danger of utter madness, destruction, and chaos. Whichever happens first depends very much on humanity and on the decisions we take.

---

[1] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 1996, 11 f.

In particular, we face the possibility of freeing ourselves from the dichotomy of spirit and matter to which centuries of carefully nurtured mental habits have enslaved us, and which have caused and still cause so much suffering in our personal lives and in the life of humanity as a whole.

How is this possible? Firstly, science has come to realize that the static dualistic worldview it has religiously adhered to since Descartes fails to give us an adequate picture of reality.[2] In particular, since Einstein, the model which sees reality (light in particular) as either particles or waves is no longer applicable. Scientists have come to appreciate that light is both particle and wave at once. This means that what once seemed to be two irreconcilable positions have come to be accepted simultaneously, and it is only by unifying both perspectives that the true nature of light could be understood.[3]

In a similar vein, scientists are beginning to realize that the alleged dichotomy between spirit and matter, as well as between subject and object, is on the verge of collapsing. Science has been forced to accept that its claim to absolute objective knowledge is untenable. We cannot refrain from being participants in our study of a given phenomenon, and we, as human beings, can only have a particular perception of that phenomenon, depending on the angle from which we view it. Such a realization has, it may be said, pulled the ground from underneath the feet of the modernists' claim to absolute scientific truth. The unfortunate corollary of this discovery, however, has taken shape in postmodernism, which has come to the conclusion that because science has failed to give us the absolute certainty we longed for, there is no such thing as absolute knowledge, and that reality is ultimately unintelligible. Now, in academic circles, any claim to knowledge is circumscribed with so many apologies that one begins to question the use of institutions claiming to serve the purpose of knowledge, when they seem to question the possibility of knowledge itself.

---

[2] See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

[3] The partial recovery in modern times of a holistic perspective was ushered in by a discovery bearing on the nature of light, even though the far-ranging repercussions of this discovery have hardly been recognized. In any visionary outlook, the nature of man, of knowing and of the world is recognized to be pervaded by light. This profoundly luminous perspective has been restated in various historical and geographical contexts by the greatest visionaries of traditions as far removed from each other as are Sufism and Tibetan Tantra and rDzogs-chen; see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, New York: Omega Publications, 1994; and Herbert V. Guenther, *The Teachings of Padmasambhava*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996. In more recent times, if we turn to the poetry and paintings of William Blake, we can see that for this great prophet "light does not shine *down* on the objects of sensory perception so much as from within, *out* of Being itself." See Brian Keeble, "William Blake: Art as Divine Vision," *Temenos Academy Review* 9 (2006), 176-88, esp. 181.

Thus, those whose avowed profession is the search for knowledge now busy themselves more with the production of theories of knowledge than with the search for truth itself. Philosophy, in particular, whose original meaning is love of wisdom, has degenerated into a profession of thinkers whose only aim is to outwit each other by producing vain and shallow arguments which are neither beneficial spiritually nor even useful materially.

3. Nature of Religion

In this state of affairs, it may be asked, where does religion stand? Does it still have any relevance in the modern world? The obvious answer given by the pragmatist historian of religion is that a mere cursory glance at the world around us will show that for a large section of people, religion, in its diverse forms, continues to play a vital role in their life and understanding of themselves and the world, and that the demise of religion predicted by Nietzsche and others has certainly not occurred so far. This is clear both in its worst manifestation of religious fundamentalism of every kind, which daily fills our headlines, and in its most sublime embodiment in saintly human beings, who still continue to exist, of which Mother Theresa and the Dalai Lama are two very prominent examples. That religion and religious aspirations are still very much part of the modern (or even the postmodern) world is also obvious from the rise of the so-called new religions, the various cult-groups whose charismatic leaders often attract large numbers of wide-eyed, naïve followers.[4]

---

[4] It is important, nevertheless, to realize that the form religious aspirations take in our contemporary world is changing. In particular, in modern societies religion no longer governs the public sphere of life as it did in the past, becoming increasingly relegated to the private sphere. In a way, this situation itself contains a huge potential, for it can enable man to go beyond the often politicized forms of religions to penetrate their mystical essence.

However, this answer, although correct as far as it goes, is rather superficial. In order to go deeper, we must probe the very nature of religion. Religion, in its essence, is that aspect of human endeavour that seeks to *relate* man back to his sacred origin. What is this sacred origin? It is essentially a Unity, what we have hinted at above by speaking of 'Being', which is the ground and source for all more limited expressions of being. In other words, any being exists solely by virtue of Being, which at once embraces all while transcending the finiteness of particular beings. Every being partakes in and expresses on the individual plane the unlimited and transcendent qualities of Being, or Being-as-such.

Religion is that link which *relates* man, as a particular being, to Being-as-such, so that, from naturally being its manifestation (as everything, without the slightest exception, is), he becomes its conscious embodiment. As he realizes to an ever fuller extent his participation in and embodiment of Being, the human being *relates* to other human beings in that capacity, respecting them as much as himself for this potential and capacity. Thus, we arrive at the embodiment in human society of the sacred configuration of individuals totally conscious of their spiritual origin and role.

What has been termed Being, or Being-as-such, has received, as the history of religion tells us, numerous names. It has been termed God, the Godhead, Allah, Yahweh, the Brahman, the Ātman, the non-Ātman, the Dao, the Buddha-nature, etc. The reason for choosing the term Being in this article is that it is neutral as regards religious doctrine and does not oblige us to incorporate into our discussion exotic terms or religiously loaded concepts. Moreover, the word Being itself expresses a very fundamental truth, namely that the world's and man's nature is *to be* before it is *to have* and *to do*. We cannot do the slightest thing whatsoever, or have an iota of dust, before we are.

What we address here is not a level where Hamlet's question "to be or not to be" has any relevance. Such questions arise when man has become alienated from Being-as-such, and find himself in the isolated state of a being. In this state, he is in the fearful situation of a small, limited being versus the seemingly infinite vastness of non-being; the latter is all that which threatens to put an end to his sense of being alive.

The irony of this situation is that it is totally self-inflicted. The state of being (in the sense of any isolated being) cannot exist in isolation to that of non-being. Both arise from a being's alienation from Being. It is only through attunement to Being-as-such, that this helpless sense of smallness and isolation can be overcome and that we can again embody wholeness and holiness.

Now, it may be objected, especially by those who are familiar with the study of religions, that the equation of the above terms, taken from very different religious contexts, with what I have named Being, is questionable and, indeed, presumptuous. Who am I to say that what the Christians mean by God, the Hindus by Brahman, the Buddhists by the Tathāgatagarbha and the Daoists by the Dao is one and the same Reality? How can this be upheld when we know from history how these various groups slaughtered each other brutally, or at least debated violently, each with the hope of establishing its God or Absolute as the only and supreme Reality?

Many modern scholars of religion are likely to claim that it is more reasonable and cautious to accept that various religious and mystical traditions merely produce local narratives of reality, discourses on truth, of which nothing can be said regarding their content, and of which it can only be said with certainty that they do indeed compete. To such doubts it can only be replied that if we are to take the various mystical traditions' narratives as representing absolute differences, then we must arrive at the conclusion that there are competing absolutes corresponding to these various traditions. Of course, this is a contradiction in terms, one that the postmodernists are likely to accept with a complacent shrug since they are so accustomed to the deadening waters of relativism. The absurd conclusion that each spiritual tradition has its own paradise, each striving to attain it, is a polite way of saying that because they differ from each other they all are false.[5]

It is one thing to assert that the various spiritual traditions have differing conceptions of Ultimate Reality, which no one in his right mind could deny; it is quite another thing to affirm that because this is the case, none of these traditions has actually come to glimpse that Reality and each is a victim of its own fantasy. The latter view is untenable for the simple reason that it is illogical and also contradicts the evidence before us.

Regarding the statement that it is illogical, it will be explained here. Each of the great mystical traditions expounds in its own way that the Ultimate Reality is beyond the confines of language and ordinary human discursive thought. For instance, the Islamic tradition does this by affirming that God is at once totally transcendent while being immanent, enveloping man in spiritual experience;[6] the Buddhist tradition does the same by stating that the Buddha is beyond birth and death, coming and going, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

---

[5] For a critique of the modernist and postmodernist approaches to the study of religion, see Dylan Esler, "The Light of Perennial Philosophy on the Study of Religion," *Sophia Journal* (Summer 2007).

Each mystical path, at the same time, seeks to provide a means whereby Ultimate Reality can be approached, experienced, and embodied by the practitioner, and allows for differing levels of participation in that Reality, depending on the temperament and commitment of the individual. In providing such a means of approach, which includes linguistic descriptions of the path itself as well as (to some extent) of Ultimate Reality, no one tradition can provide a full account for the simple reason that what it seeks to describe is truly indescribable. Each religious tradition has a particular genius for approaching Reality from a particular angle, for opening a particular perspective onto Truth, while developing, on the human plane, particular traits of saintliness.

4. Multiplicity of Religions

All religious traditions are bridges from the human to the transcendent. As such they incorporate features of human limitations together with aspects of transcendent infinity. It is quite illogical to expect anything else. To expect them to provide the same approach to Ultimate Reality would be to want a relative phenomenon to take on an absolute character.

If there were only one MAN, there would be but a single PATH. But as things are, humanity is diverse, and corresponding to these different temperaments are various religious traditions; within these, corresponding to various aptitudes and levels of commitment are differing paths, ranging from the exoteric to the esoteric modes of approach; and these again open up to ever deeper and subtler dimensions of Reality.

At the same time, the transcendent dimension on which each mystical tradition opens is also present at the outset and becomes manifest in the mystical vision of Ultimate Reality at the path's culmination, as well as in the ever unfolding embodiment of holiness in the practitioner's life. Here, we arrive at our second objection, namely that the statement that each religious tradition produces its own fantasy, apart from being illogical, also contradicts evidence. That evidence is none other than sacred art and holiness. None who has spent but a few moments of contemplation in any of the great religions' sanctuaries (even if these be but a tradition's exoteric structures), or who has heard inspired music or stood before visionary art, can fail to notice that something of the transcendent is transpiring in the world of matter. For those who are privileged to so witness, there is no more moving embodiment of transcendence than in the saint, the human being whom spiritual practice has made holy, and whose very flesh has become luminous.

---

[6] Frithjof Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1990, 13.

Such things are not wonders, nor are they coincidences, nor accidents. For such inspired art to be created, or for such saints to be alive in both past and present, there must be a cause, and that cause is none other than the recognition of Ultimate Reality; sacred art and holiness could not exist if they did not stem from Truth. If the various religious traditions were but the fantastic edifices of idle dreamers, they would never in a thousand years have been able to inspire transcendent art or saintliness. Could such beauty stem from a lie?

It is irrelevant to object that religious traditions have also produced and still continue to instigate much hatred and violence. "The corruption of the best is the worst."[7] This corruption, moreover, is accidental, not essential, that is, it stems from the limitedness of human existence.[8]

5. Multidimensionality of Religion

In order to comprehend the unity of religions, it is of absolute necessity to recognize that any given religious tradition is not a monolithic whole, but, as was hinted at above, incorporates numerous levels of participation and commitment, which open up varying degrees or dimensions of spiritual experience.[9] In other words, each religion includes both an exoteric shell and an esoteric kernel, the latter being not an accidental addition to the tradition in question, but its very essence. This is true even at times when the exotericists are unaware of, or even shun and persecute the representatives of the tradition's esoteric and mystical dimension.

---

[7] In Latin, *Corruptio optimi pessima.*

[8] Martin Lings, *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, Cambridge: Archetype, 2001, 48.

[9] This is because if we look merely at the exoteric dimension of religion, we will of course fail to discover the unity in question. This unity is not to be found on the level of forms. It is only by turning to the esoteric kernel and penetrating the outward forms to an ever greater extent until we reach the mystical dimension that it can be discovered. On the relationship between the exoteric and mystical dimensions of religion, see Shuja Alhaq, *A Forgotten Vision: A Study of Human Spirituality in the Light of the Islamic Tradition*, 2 volumes, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997, 1:24-27.

A exoteric dimension of a religion includes the rules of moral conduct which are incumbent on the mass of believers, and which they are to follow in the hope of gaining salvation after death. For the majority of Christians, this means the observance of the Church's moral code and the taking of the sacraments, with the faith that one will be forgiven one's sins and will gain entry to paradise.[10] In a similar way, for most Buddhists the goal of *nirvāṇa* is so far-fetched that they prefer to observe their moral precepts, accomplishing virtuous deeds such as donating money to their local monastery, in the hope of obtaining a good rebirth as a god or human after death.

This dimension of a religion is, of course, an important one, as in many societies across the world this was so far the best means available to regulate social interaction between human beings and to ensure that the greatest possible number of people could participate, at least passively and indirectly, in the particular religion's hue of grace. However, social control is not the only purpose of religion. If it were, there would be no dimension of grace whatsoever; and religion's activity would stop short at this outer level. The truth is that a religion's essence is its mystical dimension or esoteric kernel. This dimension, of course, is only accessible to the elite among a religion's believers, because it requires, as a pre-condition, the acutest abilities, and, for its actualization, complete dedication. It requires nothing short of death, meaning an initiatory dying to worldliness so as to be reborn among those who seek to realize transcendence in this very life.

Those seeking the mystical dimension, however, are not satisfied with gaining salvation after death. They want to experience transcendence as immanence, and seek to come face to face with the Ultimate Reality while still alive. To do this, they must die to their limited individuality, to their clinging to the world, in order to be freed from all that stands between them and the Ultimate Reality.[11] Of course, this path is much more demanding than that of the exotericist. While the outer obligations laid out by the religion, through their symbolical and regulatory value, can provide an aid on this path, they are also, at some point, transcended, either outwardly, by casting them away, or at least by inwardly becoming free of their limitations.

---

[10] For the mystic, these same observances may be seen as aids on the spiritual path. For instance, by penetrating the symbolism of the Eucharist, the Holy Mass within the Catholic tradition becomes a vehicle for mystical realization.

[11] From the perspective of Ultimate Reality, there is of course nothing which could stand between It and the mystic. In a sense it is from the individual point of view only that there is such an obstacle, as, ultimately, everything is a manifestation of, and, for the *accomplished* mystic, a pointer to the Ultimate Reality.

6. The Mystical Paradox: Expressing the Inexpressible

Every mystic is to some extent conditioned by his or her upbringing, religion, and even mystical path. In particular, although various mystics experience the same Ultimate Reality, they speak of it according to the terms in which they have been taught to think of it. For instance, some will talk of the unification of Ātman with Brahman, others of the extinguishing of the lover in the Beloved, others of the shining forth of the Buddha-nature. There will obviously be differences in their way of understanding this experience. But, it should be remembered, the mystical experience is so overwhelming that it is truly impossible to describe it fully in any terms. That experience is totally unconditioned by and beyond the limits of language.

Nonetheless, the mystic is also a human being, and it is through understanding that he reflects on the mystical experience and through language that he seeks to express it to others. His understanding of the experience in its aftermath and the language he uses to point it out to others are conditioned, even if the mystic be unaware of it.[12] Although much of the mystical experience is beyond conditioning, the mystic as a person is not.

The mystic's very vocation is one that embodies paradox, as he seeks to fathom the unfathomable and express the inexpressible; and yet he knows, beyond the least trace of doubt, that what he has experienced is infinitely more real and valuable than what is known to the common man. So, in his very person the mystic unifies the conditioned with the unconditioned, the limitedness of being human with the infinity of his realization. Especially if he is an accomplished mystic, he is not content with a one-off experience which has no relation whatsoever with his ordinary life. The difference between the ordinary and the accomplished mystic is that for the latter his experience is totally integrated to his life, and his every breath is imbued with its power.[13] He becomes an instrument that leads others to the same accomplishment, or at least to benefit from the grace which naturally surrounds anyone in constant attunement to the Ultimate Reality.

---

[12] On the relationship of mystical experience to language, see, for example, Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Centre: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism*, London and The Hague: East-West Publications, 1976, 66 f.

7. Conclusion: Closing the Circle

Having said this much about religion and mysticism, if we turn to science, we will come to realize that while for long it rejected the entire religious worldview (which was necessary for its development), it is now coming to appreciate that any understanding of the world which is true must take account of the whole of reality and be holistic. Thus, surprisingly to some, the cutting-edge scientists are coming to very similar conclusions about reality that the world's great mystics reached intuitively centuries before. In fact, we live in a privileged epoch, when we witness the fact that whether we approach reality from the angle of matter or from that of spirit, we come to the same conclusion, although by different means. This brings us back to the premise of this essay, namely that Reality is one, and that matter, energy, and spirit are but different dimensions of Reality.

For centuries man has endeavoured to free himself from the gravity of matter, transcending his given condition through elevation of the spirit. In relatively recent times (i.e., since the Copernican revolution), we have sought to transcend that gravity not through elevating ourselves above matter, but by penetrating it to ever greater depths through understanding and mastery of its laws. But by penetrating the atom scientists have come to realize that every atom contains the information-structures of galaxies, so that the smallest microcosm reflects the macrocosm as a whole. The universe reflects itself endlessly like a gallery of mirrors, and we, as observers, are also mirrors interdependently linked to all other mirrors, whether animate or inanimate. Finally, all these reflect Reality, in its unfathomable mystery and endlessly enchanting beauty.[14]

---

[13] In Sanskrit, the difference between the ordinary and the accomplished mystic is expressed with the terms *sādhaka* in *siddha*, respectively.

[14] I would like to express my gratitude to Venerable Naga Choegyal, whose constructive criticism and insightful comments have greatly benefited this paper. It has also profited immensely from discussions with Shuja Alhaq on the subject of science and its relation to spirituality.

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 191-212

Reflection: 1

RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN INTERFAITH CONTEXTS

Narratives from a Pilgrim's Interfaith Encounters

Albert Nambiaparambil◆

1. Introduction: Matching Words by Deeds

As I sit down to take note of the very first lessons learned in the path of interfaith dialogue, the very last statement of the declaration that emerged as the findings of the very first interfaith event, the World Conference of Religions, Kochi, Kerala, November 15-21, 1981, echoes in my mind: "*Let our words be matched by deeds*." We have come a long way. These parting words of the Meet, however, continue to ring new notes for us, as we continue our interfaith pilgrimage, trying to learn new lessons in interfaith literacy. Back in the seventies, I had to cover long distances in the train, mostly in the 3-tier compartments. These travels provided very good opportunities to discover new interfaith friends. One of these friends was P. Govindapilla, a Marxist leader and writer, from Kerala. I recall one of those meaningful exchanges.

Our conversation was around the 'hope that is in us'. He shared his dream of the society of tomorrow, without class, exploitation, and alienation. I was sharing with him a packet of banana-chips along with the conversation. To give him a taste of the society of my dreams, I took off from the Gospel of Mathew, chapter 25, about the norms set therein, of sharing our resources, about the last judgment, etc. His response was, as I recall now, that he was not hearing this vision lived out or spread out by the Christian community at large. Well, let me remind me and our dialogue friends this note, that our words are to be matched by deeds, and that our deeds speak louder than our words.

◆**Dr. Albert Nambiaparambil CMI**, after procuring his doctorate in philosophy and a long academic career, is a full-time dedicated dialogue partner of religions. Apart from arranging regular dialogue meetings among the members of different religions – nationally and internationally – and holding different offices in this regard, he is a regular contributor to various periodicals and scientific journals on world religions.

1.2. Religions Divide!

We were around thirty interfaith fellow-pilgrims winding up our three days of 'live-together experience' in CSR, Pariyaram, Kerala, in April 2007, sitting by the side of the Chalakudy River. We were narrating our own stories, sharing our interfaith experiences and experiments. We found time also to share our dreams, our failure-stories too, as we were moving on and on. In that parting session, so-to-say, one of the participants, Joseph Puthiadam, who was rather silent all through the proceedings, had this to tell: "Our family got settled near Peerumedu in Kerala. In our village, we were Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. A church was established in our village. Slowly this church became the unifying point, the meeting point of us all, especially during the celebrations. Our communities did not feel, then, any distance between us. Later on, a temple and, then, a mosque were established. Now we realize that we are different, that we are separate. In Bangalore, I received an invitation from Father Albert to join this interfaith pilgrimage. I am now here in this path of dialogue." He is now a regular partner in our dialogue meetings, always ready to extend a supporting hand, as we meet.

1.3. Dividing and Uniting Religion

The question that Joseph Puthiadam raised, however, is delicate. Is 'religion' a dividing factor within human community or a unifying one? Often we hear statements such as 'religions divide' and 'religions unite', of course, in different linguistic contexts. It can also be said that 'religions' divide while 'religion' unites. I also hear others saying that religion, at a superficial level, divides while, at the deeper level, it can be a unifying bond. Leaving these two 'slogans' about religion for further discussion, let me now turn to another slogan gaining ground in inter-religious circles: "to be religious is to be inter-religious."

2.1. Bonding Religion to Inter-Religion

Recently, in a meet organized by the CBCI Commission for Dialogue, I heard once again this slogan "to be religious is to be inter-religious." In interfaith gatherings, I have heard partners from different religious traditions giving reasons for their dialogic involvement, picking up one or other assertions or statements from the particular tradition. Our Hindu friends very often pick up the Vedic assertion "*ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*," truth is one, seekers call it by different names. Our Muslim partners often repeat their position: we accept all the Prophets, and give them same respect. Thus, from the different religious or inter-religious circles, this formulation that "to be religious is to be inter-religious" is getting general acceptance.

2.2. Goal of Dialogue

While taking part in an interfaith meet associated with the *Kumbhamela* event at Allahabad, a Catholic religious leader asked me very personally as to what is the end or purpose of this 'dialogue'. He was, as I understood then, asking me to give the reason or motive of our involvement in interfaith dialogue. The context and participants were predominantly Hindu. Was he asking me to link this dialogue-commitment to the important task of proclaiming the 'Good News'? I wonder! I did not wait or ask for a further clarification. Rather, my response took a different route – that of presenting the Christian Mission of Dialogue as the continuation of the Mission of Love. My reason for *dialogue* is nothing but the expression of Love, which is the essence of being a Christian (1 Jn. 4:16).

2.3. Proclamation and Dialogue

Will this my understanding of dialogue, as the expression of the Christian vocation of Love, be understood or accepted by all Christians? Need not be, I would say. The Christian vocation to 'proclaim' the Good News cannot be compromised and side-tracked. How does one relate or link these two commitments is a valid question. Let me not pick up that here. All that I would like to hold or say here is that the commitment to interfaith dialogue flows from my being a Christian and needs no further justification. So too, the task of proclamation of the 'Good News' is the path of any Christian.

But, often I wondered, in contexts of dialogue as to who is the agent of proclamation. Christians? 'Yes' should be the answer. But, interfaith encounters expose us to those of other faiths becoming agents of the 'Good News'. I recall an incident. An interfaith 'live-together' was being organized in Pune, in *Christ-prema-sevaa Ashram*, back in 1974. We were having our simple, vegetarian lunch, seated on the floor. Towards the end, Swami Chidanandaji of Shivananda Ashram, rose from his place and started distributing printed copies of the *Prayer of Assisi* – "Lord make me an instrument of thy peace" – to all the participants. I recall the instance of another Hindu Swami – whom I wanted not to invite for that 'live-in' – made his contribution for the expenses to be covered, with the words: "Father Albert, this is Lord's work, do carry on."

2.4. Eucharist and Dialogue

In a poem that I wrote with the title "*This is My Body*," I tried to depict the commitment to dialogue as flowing from the Eucharistic experience. It came as a surprise and reward to me when Honourable Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer took note of these meditative lines and wrote: "What is the significance of 'This is My Body' in dialogue? That is the methodology of Nambiaparambil" (See my *Pilgrims on the Seashore of Endless Worlds*, xiii; henceforth as PSEW). Tuning in to the music and *bhajans* of the Hindu pilgrims on their way to the uphill shrine of Lord Ayyppa of Sabarimala in Kerala, repeating the words that everything and everyone is the same Lord, "*ellamellamayyappan*," I wrote the following lines:

Floating in this river of sorrow,
Searching for a ray of hope in darkness,
Humans, pilgrims, repeat this cry: *this is my body* (PSEW 3).

I do understand the question of Justice Krishna Iyer. The lines that I have cited here flow from the Christian faith celebrated in the Eucharistic experience. This may not have any vibration for one looking at Eucharist from a secular perspective. Nor will it, perhaps, ring any note to one who is worried at the Eucharistic celebration as a dividing factor in the sense that others are not allowed or invited to inter-communion.

2.5. Dialogue as a Pilgrimage

I return to the slogan "to be religious is to be inter-religious." This spirit was latent in the call of the Holy Father Pope Paul VI to the fellow pilgrims who met him in Mumbai: "to meet not in buildings of stone and brick but as pilgrims set out to find God." For any pilgrim, for that matter, the focus is on the 'further shores', on the 'not-yet', on the Beyond. The baggage, the heritage of every tradition, is not side tracked, is not denied, is not compromised; but the attention, as fellow pilgrims, is focused on the goal. With this 'focus' of all fellow pilgrims, "*to be religious is to be inter-religious*" is a very suggestive slogan.

3. Dialogue as Celebration

As I started off finding my paths in this dialogue-pilgrimage, along with the supporting hands of a few friends, I took steps to begin a few centres for dialogue. One of them was '*Sopanam*', a township on the way to the uphill town of Munnar, in Kerala. As is natural with any institution run by a religious congregation, it was but natural that those who are in charge need not have this charisma for the ministry of dialogue. Later, a very well run English medium school was started there and it was but natural that the focus and attention shifted to the efficient running of the school.

A few years ago there was too much of the monsoon rains. The students of the school were playing football in the playground by the side of the school. The ball fell in the small but almost overflowing river. Two boys – both Hindus – trying to get back the ball, fell into that river and were drowned in the flood. The body of one of the boys was recovered; all attempts to get back the other body failed.

It was now the very first anniversary marking the death of the two young boys. The school principal rang me up and asked for my opinion about any meaningful way of marking the death anniversary of the two school boys. I suggested that we observe the day by an interfaith prayer service, with songs, prayers, readings from sacred scriptures, followed by moments of silent reflections. A parent of the young student, whose body was not recovered, lighted the very first wick of the oil lamp. The prayer session lasted one hour and a half. The students, staff, and the few parents who joined us were very much moved and touched by this celebration of the painful memories. I mention this at the outset of these reflections, to point out that the language of celebration may be the most meaningful one in our interfaith pilgrimage, and that interfaith language can take different expressions.

4.1. Openness Eliciting Openness

It was the year end of 1980. After almost eight years of continuous travel in India, forming interfaith groups and organizing interfaith 'live-together' sessions in different centres, it was time for us to take stock of the interfaith steps so far taken. The directors of different dialogue groups and centres, along with a few diocesan coordinators of dialogue, came together in the Shivanandashram, Rishikesh. During the prayer-reflection session on the very first evening, Monsignor Pietro Rossano, the Vatican Secretary in charge of dialogue, shared his intimate feelings of 'tension between identity and openness' that he was experiencing there and then. Dialogue as a movement was setting in motion different waves in the Christian communities, especially in the Indian church. Liturgical experiments, attempts at inculturation and adaptation were being tried out in different places. There were reactions and doubts. We started off with a prayer-hymn, *bhajan*, "*om jagadeeswara*." Taking up the sharing mood, Swami Chidanandaji, the president of the Shivanandashram had this to offer: "I will not say anything about the tension between 'identity and openness'; but, I can tell you that openness elicits openness; that, the more open you are, the more open we will be."

4.2. *Heaven is Other People*

Worth stressing here is a key-note: that dialogue is between persons and not between systems and organizations. True, systems, organizations, ideologies, etc., are all coming in the picture. They matter and have a great role to play in interfaith dialogue. Dialogue, however, is between human beings. It is in this expression of openness eliciting openness that interfaith dialogue should happen. Dialogue is the flowering of inter-subjectivity. Partners in interfaith dialogue are contributing to the great '*we*' formation. The drama of life that would make us play out in our real life is that of '*heaven is other people*', in contrast with the 'hell is other people', in the "No Exit" of Jean Paul Sartre.

4.3. Subject-Subject Relation

There is always the inherent danger of human relations falling from "I-I" to "I-it," from "subject-subject" relation to "subject-object" relation. Genuine conversation and conversion happen in this subject-subject horizon. I would say that I have no right to make anyone an 'object' of conversion. In an authentic dialogue, conversion can occur and does occur in both the partners of dialogue. But this should not be resulting from one partner making the other an 'object' of conversion.

5.1. Crossing the Boundaries of the 'Kitchen Language'

Let me go back to an encounter – Hindu-Christian – that took place in Rome, in Vatican, in the office of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. I accompanied my Hindu friend, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati to the President of the Pontifical Council. By way of conversation the Vatican official raised the issue of re-incarnation, *punarjanma*, which is a tenet of the Hindu faith-tradition, but not of the Christian tradition. In responding to the issue raised by the Cardinal, my Hindu friend observed: both of us – Christian and Hindu – 'believe' that all is not over by this life; that life continues after death. He added that both of us '*know*' practically nothing about the life hereafter and that all the talk thereabout is more or less a kind of '*bla-bla*'. The conversation or 'dialogue' around *punarjanma* did end there and took up other topics. That dialogue was, indeed, very friendly!

5.2. Kitchen Language

Let me borrow a tool for testing any meaningful language, for sorting out the language that is meaningful from the nonsensical language, offered by Ludwig Wittgenstein. I would say that any language gets meaning within the boundaries of its use, within the particular language-game. This is all the more applicable within the faith-language that is being used in any 'religious language', wherein the faiths, creeds and beliefs, symbols and rituals come into play. 'There are three persons in the Trinity' is a faith language, employed within the Christian faith-tradition. That there is only one, there cannot be two, is asserted in the Islamic tradition. Such assertions get meaning within the boundaries of these two faith-languages, or language-games. Thus, languages get meaning within the boundaries of the particular faith tradition. I would feel like saying that any religious language is beautiful and meaningful as any 'kitchen language' is meaningful within the particular 'kitchen'.

5.3. Crossing the Boundaries

Partners in interfaith-dialogue have to be on guard against crossing the boundaries of the particular faith-tradition. Even if the same words such as, 'salvation', 'incarnation', 'god', 'creator', etc., are used by a Hindu and a Christian, the meanings involved may be so different within two 'kitchens'! This may be the case when one asserts on the need, on the right to 'conversion', and of another partner ruling out the right to convert another as going against human dignity. In this case the faith in the '*karma*' theory may be involved, while in the former case there may not be that faith. Thus, for a Christian, the appeal may be to the duty enshrined in the teachings of the gospel or on certain article in the UN Charter (§18). In any case, it would be important to clarify the boundaries of the kitchens or of the 'games' involved.

5.4. Learning from Failures

Inter-religious encounters often offer to the participants opportunities of learning from failures. Let me illustrate this point by mentioning a failure from which we learned a painful lesson. It was in November 1981, during the last session of the World Conference of Religions, held in Kochi. The draft declaration that emerged from the deliberations of over three hundred dialogue pilgrims was being discussed for approval. The draft was read out. Moderator of the session was Father Amalorpavadas, the director of NBCLC, Bangalore. He sought the permission of the participants to take up the draft for discussion. There was strong opposition to the draft from a group of Buddhist delegates. They were not happy about the overload of theistic terminology that was used in the draft, as God, divine, absolute, etc. In this delicate situation, Raimundo Panikkar, a key speaker of the meet, brought in an additional paragraph, confessing our failure to arrive at a language meaningful to all, to express all that we wanted to say (PSEW 130). Once this confessional statement was brought in and accepted, the objections were withdrawn.

6.1. Wrong Questions Seeking Answers!

It is important to face and to understand the wrong questions that are being raised in interfaith meets and encounters, in interfaith contexts. Recently, I have heard this question of "salvation outside the church" repeated in two conferences, convened by a Hindu Ashram, in Banaras and Allahabad (during the Kumbhamela of 2006). The question is often raised clubbing the three monotheistic religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, as converting religions. Mentioning the Catholic tradition in particular, the assertion, "there is no salvation outside the church," is made. I hear a response from the Christian side that this assertion is no more held by Christians, that this is a 'pre-Vatican' position, and that it is no more taught by the church.

6.2. Linguistic Confusion?

My position is rather different: it is one of helping the participants to sort out the words in the very question, before jumping into an answer. My effort would be to ask the question as to who is '*inside*' and who is '*outside*'; again, the focus should be in pointing out the differences involved in the use of the word 'salvation' within the Hindu and Christian contexts. The word 'church' may draw different pictures to different partners who raise the question and even to the Christians, who straight away jump with a positive or negative answer. My attempt would be that of helping the dialogue-partners to find for themselves the answer, in clarifying the different meanings involved in the words used. Thus, for a Hindu 'salvation' would mean getting out of the circle of birth and rebirth, out of '*samsara*'. I would also point out the fact that the official teaching of Catholic Church was against the position restricting salvation to the baptized people – denying salvation to Hindus, to those of other faiths.

6.3. 'Uniqueness' in Question

There was an issue that was repeatedly raised in the context of interfaith dialogue: the uniqueness *of Christ and of Christianity.* I recall an incident that had happened in 1971. The inaugural function of the Chavara Cultural Centre of Kochi, Kerala, India, was going on. A seminar on "Religion and Culture" was part of the program. A Hindu, Christian, and a Muslim were among the panel of speakers. The Christian speaker, while giving a picture of Christianity towards world culture remarked that Jesus was the only founder of a religion who made the claim to be the "way, truth and light" of the world.

After that meet, I met the speaker and observed that this particular position is perhaps rather misplaced. My reason was that one of the religions in the picture, Hinduism, has no founder at all. I have felt that Christian partners in dialogue often raise this issue of the 'uniqueness of Christ' and seek answers. This effort is very rarely held by Hindu dialogue-partners, although we hear them sharing their vision of Hinduism as the ancient religion – *sanatana dharma*, the most universal and tolerant religion. Muslims come out presenting Islam as the *religion of peace*, as laying out the most perfect code of life. Buddhists point to the *compassion* as the outstanding trait. Christianity is presented often as the religion of *love*.

I recall another instance, where the question of 'uniqueness' was raised in the context of conversion from one religion to another. The conversion of a Hindu writer, Madhavikutty from Hindu religion to Islam was making media headlines in Kerala. Following this news, another Hindu writer, Balachandran Chullikkattu, announced his conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism. This Balachandran was the speaker in one of the programmes arranged in Upasana, Thodupuzha, Kerala. After his presentation, as it is the custom, there was a discussion. A Hindu participant in the meet raised this question to the speaker: 'What was lacking or missing in Hinduism that he found in Buddhism?' Without posing even for a moment of reflection, Balachandran raised a question in return whether the questioner was married or not. On getting a positive reply, the speaker continued whether he married his wife after proving her to be the most beautiful woman around! There was no further question on this topic.

The question on 'uniqueness' continues to be raised and discussed in the contexts of ongoing dialogue. I would say that this is but natural.

Even the partners from other faiths, who are not that bent on raising this question in relation to their own religion, still make efforts to point out the distinguishing features of their tradition. This discussion on 'uniqueness' should go on. Answers, I would say, are to be sought and found within the context of the faith assertions of different religious traditions.

6.4. World-Time-Vision Involved

There are other assertions that block dialogue partners from understanding each other. Let me pick up one factor. Here is a statement, "Jesus is the *only* saviour." The opposite would be that of saying that there are as many saviours as there are religions. In any case, it would be worth the trouble, if we look at the time-frame within which this word '*only*' comes in the Bible, in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:12). The context is not at all that of telling that there are no other redeemers, that of eliminating others. Again, the time-vision involved is that of linear-time, all inclusive time. The use of the word in this context is not at all 'exclusive', although in ordinary use the word '*only*' is exclusive. My Hindu friends, who raise this question, have a circular or spiral vision of time. For them the word '*only*' would sound 'exclusive'. The inability or difficulty of dialogue partners to understand each other, because of the differences in the world-time-vision, is a key factor in inter-religious literacy and communication.

6.5. When Language of Documents Blocks!

Often the partners in dialogue are scared away in opening themselves out because they are aware of the existence of documents that give them the impression that one group or other claims some kind of 'superiority'. The assumption is that dialogue is possible only between 'equals'. Any claim to superiority by one side may block the dialogic openness.

The document *Dominus Jesus* is often cited as an example. There is here in this document the assertion that Jesus is the universal saviour, and the '*only*' saviour; that the 'Kingdom of God' cannot be seen separated from the Church and so on. There are pointers in the document on the dangers of religious indifferentism and relativism. The language used, as I look at it, is one that may be labelled as 'possessive' or that of 'having'. Those who are not familiar with this style may find it difficult to accept the claims made in the document. While an effort should be made from the part of Christians to understand the difficulty of 'outsiders' to understand this language, it is important to take note that the document is nothing but a restatement of the traditional teachings of the Church. It would be important to take note of the particular linguistic context of the language used in this and similar documents. This would help the dialogue partners to differentiate the content from kind of language used, to express the stand against relativism.

6.6. Relativism and Faith

I have often felt that there are contexts in interfaith dialogue wherein the only way to make our faith content absolute is to make relative the language about faith. This is all the more true when the partners who go through experiences in inter-religious prayer, meditation, sharing sessions. One way would be that of avoiding words and symbols that are sectarian and of using those that are suggestive, evocative, and capable of producing vibrations in all the participants.

In early 2007, a few of us interfaith-pilgrims went through an 'interfaith retreat' that included an in-depth sharing of our interfaith dreams and difficulties met within our paths. A group of students of the school at the venue of our meet (Carmelgiri Public School, Korandakad, Munnar) expressed their readiness to join us, in an experiential exposure to the interfaith dialogue. They joined us and their contribution was with the song of "Lead Kindly Light." Later on, we sang together the songs: "We shall overcome" and the "Song of Ruth." There was no relativism in this approach. Rather, we were trying to help each other in an experiential exposure. Were the differences between faith tenets blurred by this exercise? Was their faith made relative when the participants – belonging to Hindu and Christian traditions – lighted different wicks of the oil lamp, while all the participants chanted the *bhajan*, "*asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*" ("Lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to eternal life")? Far from it, indeed, as far as I could take note of!

7.1. Pictures of Self-Understanding

It would be helpful to pick up another tool from Wittgenstein to test the meaningful language. According to this tool, any language that is meaningful will draw a picture. Thus, if a word doesn't give us a picture, that word would be meaningless, would be 'nonsense'. As a Christian, I have or I should have my own picture of self-understanding, as a member of the particular community. The same should be said about those of other communities. In opening out to those of other faith-traditions, we would and should look for pictures of self-understanding that are inclusive and open.

7.2. Changing Pictures

Before I took to this path of interfaith, I was happy with a kind of picture that placed me in a circle or sphere, with Christ at the centre. In this picture, those of other faiths are invited to join through the acceptance of baptism. Later on, I found myself more comfortable with another picture wherein others, those of other faiths and ideologies, were placed in different circles around my circle of Christians. At a later stage, as I got more and more involved with those of other faiths, there was a sense of dissatisfaction deep within me about my earlier pictures of self-understanding. I picked up an atomic or star-like picture, with a light placed at the centre. This picture brought home to me the experience of us all being equal, as fellow pilgrims.

My Hindu friends often draw the pictures of different paths leading to the same mountain top, of different rivers flowing and merging in the same ocean, of the same moon seen as many moons in the same pond, with the waves reflecting the One and so on.

7.3. Changing Language

The effort of all dialogue pilgrims, I would say, is to leave out the exclusive pictures and draw more and more inclusive pictures of dialogic self-understanding. There was a time when, from a kind of exclusive self-understanding, I was happy to label others as 'pantheists', as non-Christians, as 'polytheists'. The dialogic discovery of others made me change my labels too: those of other faiths, of other religious traditions, fellow pilgrims, etc.

8.1. 'Saving Presence'

Any Christian partner is placed in a delicate situation, when he or she is called upon both by the insiders and the outsiders to relate the task of dialogue with that of *proclamation*. I had to find my own responses all through this pilgrimage of dialogue. This was for me a new learning and unlearning process. I recall the time when dialogue was understood as a *means* for proclamation, as a *preparation* for proclamation. Related to this question was the new look at the other religions from the perspective of their redemptive value. There was a time when the word *natural* was used about these other religions while Christianity was seen as the *supernatural* religion.

8.2. Intra-Religious Dialogue

The Vatican Council II gives us a different, positive, picture of these other religions. They are judged as containing *seeds of the Word of God* and as reflecting *the rays of the Spirit that enlightens us all.* Well known in the theological circles is the phrase '*Anonymous Christians*' ascribed to those of other religious traditions, from the perspective of their redemptive value. The issue before us is not only that of the salvation of those of other religions, but of the saving function of these very religions. Any serious inter-religious dialogue calls upon the dialogue partners for *intra-religious* dialogues within the communities on these and related issues.

It was in the context of these ongoing reflections in the Church in India that a fresh look was taken on dialogue in relation to evangelization in the Calcutta Session of the CBCI. This was done in preparation for the Synod in Rome, which was to focus on evangelization. Called upon to draft a description of dialogue, this formulation was accepted by the group that was working on 'dialogue'. Dialogue was described as "flowing from the Christian faith in God's *saving presence* in the religious traditions of mankind and the expression of the firm hope in their fulfilment in Christ." Does this formulation give a satisfactory answer to the questions that are asked by those of other faiths and by the insiders? I feel like answering in the negative. The duty of *proclamation of the Good News* is in no way diminished by this ministry of dialogue. Proclamation and inter-religious dialogue may be seen as mutually related paths of the one mission of Love.

8.3. Religious Education for 'Outsiders'

Dialogue, *intra-religious dialogue*, when gone through, changes and converts the communities involved in the process. Let me illustrate this by a conversion that the Indian Church went through. The duty of religious education, to those of other faiths in educational institutions run by Christians, was raised and discussed in the Church in India Seminar (held in Dharmaram College, Bangalore, 1969). This issue was again raised in the subsequent meets within the Church. The need of providing religious education – to those of other religious traditions – was brought in for consideration of the drafting committee – with Gispert Sauch doing the drafting work – of the *Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue* set up by the CBCI Dialogue Commission. The main issue was whether we are bound to provide for the religious education of students of other faiths, by competent persons of these traditions. The practice was that of giving religious instructions to Christians, while offering 'moral' education to the 'outsiders', i.e., to the students from other religions. The issue was raised and shelved during the first edition of the *Guidelines*. But the topic was again raised, when the second edition of the *Guidelines* was being drafted. This time, the Dialogue Commission discussed the matter in detail. The new revised edition incorporated the proposal and asserted that it is a duty on us Christian educators to provide for the *religious education* of those students from other religious traditions, by competent persons of these faiths, wherever possible (PSEW 104). On a few occasions, I have cited this fruit of *intra-religious* dialogue within the Christian community in India, requesting, suggesting, and inviting those of other faiths, to go through the home-work of *intra-religious dialogue* within their own home-communities.

9.1. Exodus from the Prison of Stereotypes

In our meet at CSR, Chalakudy, Kerala, referred to earlier, we made a new attempt to share our prejudices and stereotypes about others. To set the ball rolling, I shared my own inhibitions about Muslims. As I started off, two of my Christian partners expressed their doubts as to the 'prudence', about the very purpose of sharing the misunderstandings about our dialogue-partners, of another faith-tradition. My response was that as dialogue-partners we should come out sharing our own prejudices. This way, there will be no divergence between what we share in our own home-communities about those of other faith-families and the language that we use when we come together in interfaith pilgrimage. In response, a long-time dialogue partner of Islamic tradition shared his own inhibited pictures about Christians. This sharing brought about a sense of 'release' to both of us. One of the Christian participants, who had earlier expressed his doubts about this attempt, later on shared with me that the sharing of our own hidden prejudices was a great moment in the interfaith openness.

9.2. In a 'Secular' Context

The 'secular', understood as equidistant from all religions or as equal treatment of all religions, is bringing in a new, an important note, to interfaith dialogue in India. This is affecting our interfaith language, I would say, positively. This 'secular' dimension of our nation offers us, dialogue pilgrims, a sense of freedom, openness, and courage. One of the key-notes of interfaith dialogue is the assurance that all of us are equals in this path. It would serve no purpose here to compare religions and place one religion over another. The 'secular' note assures of equal treatment to all believers.

9.3. Equals, Or?

In interfaith contexts, I have often heard expressions like, *all religions are equal, all religious are the 'same'*, etc. I find it difficult to use the word 'equal' about religions! The question remains: Is *sarvadharma samabhavana* – attitude of considering all religions as *equal* – an essential note of interfaith understanding and openness? Is 'equality' a note applicable to religions or to the persons as fellow pilgrims? Perhaps a way of looking at other religious traditions as one's own may be more apt for us all – *sarvadharma mamabhavana.*

9.4. Tolerance

In dialogue-meets we repeatedly hear partners sharing their deep concern for 'tolerance'. This word, when said by dialogue-friends, suggests a very positive content – that of appreciative acceptance of different traditions, while belonging to and fundamentally inserted in one tradition. Our Hindu friends in dialogue often point out this 'tolerance' as the specific note of Hindu religiosity, while others stress the need of going beyond tolerance to an appreciative acceptance and openness to other traditions. I would say that when a Hindu uses this word, the openness and acceptance of other paths is already there in their use of the word.

9.5. Bilateral Contexts

India is the nation with the confluence of different religions of the world and the birth place of Hinduism, Budhism, Jainism, and Sikhism among the major religions of the world. India provides an atmosphere that welcomes multilateral dialogues. But, when dialogue happens between followers of two communities – bilateral dialogues – it would demand from the partners more attention and caution in the language selected, in the symbols used, in the background prepared, and in the rituals selected. Just an example to show this point: Christians are inclined to call God, 'father'; but, our Muslim friends are not that happy with this use of the word 'father' about God.

We have to be attentive in picking up symbols. To illustrate this, let me recall the example of Advocate K. P. Alikunju, a Muslim. He was very regular in all the dialogue meets that I took the initiate to organize in the Chavara Centre of Kochi, in the seventies. He would never light along with us the oil lamp in the interfaith prayer services that we held often, in those early years of our dialogue pilgrimage. But, later on he started lighting the oil lamp or the candle.

10.1. Agree to Disagree

Examples can be given wherein I could not go all the way with certain cultural items as singing certain songs that was very much identified with one particular tradition. Inter-communion is an issue often raised, when Eucharist is celebrated during interfaith 'live-together' sessions. I recall the instance of a Hindu dialogue partner, who lined up and received communion, as we were both resource persons in a course on dialogue, held in a seminary. One seminarian told me of his surprise at this. When I shared this with the Hindu friend, he replied that he accepted communion, so that his not accepting communion may be a cause of surprise to the seminarians!

There are many issues as the use of sacred scriptures of other religions in the liturgy. Bilateral dialogues will demand from the partners answers to many questions likely to be raised in such contexts. As an example, the 'death and resurrection of Jesus' are likely to be raised in dialogues between an Ahammadiya and a Christian; so too the belief in the Trinity may need a kind of delicate sharing between Muslim and Christian dialogue partners. In a dialogue wherein Buddhist members are participants, I would be cautious with the use of monotheistic language. In Upasana, the 'centre for religio-cultural integration' – of which I am at present the director – a few rationalists take part in the regular weekly meet and in the discussion that follows. They may not stand up for the moments of silent prayer at the beginning. I would say, let us agree to disagree.

10.2. A Pilgrimage in Tension

I was a participant in a Meet organized by the CBCI Dialogue Commission, in April 2007, in Bangalore. Directors of various centres of dialogue, regional coordinators of dialogue, members of the commission and a few special invitees were the participants. There was, after the dinner, a get-together of us all. The participants were invited to a rhythmic dance, with a Sufi-touch. The song that was sung along with the rhythmic steps had certain words expressing surrender to a particular Hindu deity, *Gobinda.* Though invited pressingly to join the dance-formation, I found it difficult to repeat the word. A few other Christian friends found no difficulty at all to sing along and dance with the rest. I noted that one of the members of the commission, who was in the room, walking out, as the dance-song started. Later on, he shared with me his own difficulty in taking part in that item.

10.3. Sensitising Exchanges

There were and there are others among the 'insiders' who may find nothing objectionable in any such items. Is there not the hidden danger of syncretism in certain expressions that a few of our friends dare to take, in certain interfaith meets? I recall a Christian dialogue-partner who was in the habit of greeting others, using the name of a Hindu deity as '*om nama shivaya*', even when he greeted partners belonging to the Christian community! It was difficult for me to respond with same words. Bilateral and multilateral exchanges and celebrations may demand from us sensitivity to sensitivities of each other, of the communities involved.

10.4. Revivalist Trends

There are revivalist groups who look with suspicion on all attempts at inculturation and adaptation. They, in turn, look with suspicion on any move towards dialogue, as compromising on one's own faith. To be religious is to be inter-religious, and to be inter-religious is to move on and on, as fellow pilgrims in healthy tension.

11.1. Converging in Depths

Very often interfaith dialogue remains at the level of exchanges at the knowledge level, of information gathering and sharing, of analytical skills, of comparative religion. This is important, good, and, indeed, necessary. Most of the time dialogue remained at this level, as I entered the field. As I took up the work as secretary of the Commission for Dialogue, in the CBCI, a new step was taken. In February 1973, the Commission organized in Banaras an interfaith 'live-together', of four days, with the participants of different faiths. They shared their life-stories and anecdotes around topics that were deeply personal, intermingled with prayers, songs, and meditation sessions, in which all could join. This was for all of us a very enriching experience. We followed this pattern of inter-religious in-depth encounters on many other occasions.

11.2. Creative Discoveries

Interfaith, in-depth, confluence may and do take at times new expressions. One such expression was that of interfaith procession, with lighted candles in the hand, with the symbols of different religious and spiritual traditions held or raised at different locations, with the prayers said for each tradition by one or other from a different religion, with the *Talisman of Gandhi* or the *Prayer of Assisi*. Converging in a circle with the pattern of a camp-fire, the participants had the time for giving expression to their deep experiences in songs, prayers, with lighted candles in their hands. Perhaps such in-depth experiences are the ones that the dialogue-pilgrims cherish for long, and bring them together again and again to the interfaith celebrations.

11.3. "*Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*"

Called upon to explain the 'rational' for interfaith involvements, I often pick up a few lines from a poem of G. Shankarakurup, from *Viswadarshan* – world vision. The poet draws the picture of a butterfly sitting on a globe, and musing that the globe rotates because she moves her wings. Later on, the butterfly is shown the picture of ever expanding horizons, of the distant galaxies, and we hear the expressions in the following verse:

> Oh distance, I salute thee! Oh darkness, my salutations to you
> When we are afar, we are near! When near, we are afar!
> I took my pen in all pride – I lay it down in all shudder
> I wish, I could practice a bit more of humility, purity of vision![1]

Lost in this vision, the butterfly goes through a genuine conversion: I am a meagre spot on the *sari* – outer garment – of a gypsy girl!

This poet was living across the street of the Chavara Cultural Centre, Kochi. I used to visit him often in his house. One day I asked him as to what made him write this poem. He told me that the conversation between the fighter Arjuna and Lord Krishna led to the plea of Arjuna for a vision of the real form of the Lord and he got it. It was that moment of divine manifestation at the peak that made him write these lines!

The poet proceeded to tell me his response to a rationalist who criticized him for his rather 'superstitious' leanings, for giving the name of a temple-deity, *Guruvayoorappan*, to a literary endowment that he established, spending part of the very first *Gnanapeedham award* that he received: A bird soaring high up in the air can look down and say – I have reached so high, these heights. The same bird can look higher up to the unexplored distances and say – I have so much to go further. The poet told the rationalist that his poem is the symbol of the second look.

---

[1] "*doorame namaskarinnu nine jnan / andhakarame ninakumen sadara namovakam. / doorttiladuppamundaduppattinkal tanne, / dooravum prtibhatan mohana prapanchattil' / -njan ahamkarattode kayyilentiayatanippena- / vakunnu tazhe ku;ninju;m, virapoondum. / Ittiri vinayavum samasudhamam chetovruttiyum- / Seelikuvan eniku sadhicchengil!*"

The point that I would like to make is, that in order to be fellow pilgrims in the interfaith pilgrimage, the partners have to regain this shudder, this awe and dread, that are the typical features or notes, of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the notes of religious experience, as brought out by the analysis of Rudolf Otto, in the *Idea of Holy*. Herein the partners are engaged in new forms of communication, to speak that word, from which words return unable to reach that word – *yatovacha nivartante apprapya manasa saha*. The focus, the goal is the *mysterium*, the unknown, the ineffable with the pilgrims giving expression in total surrender, *saranam gacchami.*

12.1. Where Do We Go from Here?

I am raising a question that I realize is difficult to answer, because no answer is ready at hand. Repeatedly, I hear this question from my friends and from those who are cynical about interfaith dialogues: "What have you achieved?" If you are patient enough, a list of communal tensions and conflicts will follow. In other areas as hospital apostolate, educational ministry, social action, there are clear norms of success and failure. All these tangible norms of evaluating success and failure are simply not there in this ministry of dialogue! Can one measure the emerging sense of communion and trust between the fellow pilgrims of different religions, unless and until you enter this very confluence?

Related to this is the very fact that those involved in interfaith activities cannot hand over to others, the networking of fellowship so far achieved, except, perhaps the address list of the friends across the boundaries. Many a dialogue centre or group has this story to tell: of diminishing membership, of disappearing members, of the centre going through a transition to activities that can show tangible results! Naturally, the interfaith programs will have to give way to other projects, to adjust to the new situations!

12.2. Multiple Memberships

As I started off in this path of interfaith, I met Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, a Hindu monk, about whom I mentioned in the Vatican Secretariat encounter (PSEW 84). He told me of his school days. There was in the school a questionnaire to be filled in by the students. Names of different religions were read out and the students, one by one, had to say the religion to which he or she belonged. Yati told us in a talk that he used to stand up for all the three religions that were being marked out for each student. He told us that he was scolded by the teacher (PSEW 43). But, he insisted that he belonged to all religions. I have come across a few, who do hold that while rooted in one particular tradition, one can also be experientially inserted in another tradition. Many others, however, deny this multiple loyalty in religions! While I was thinking over this situation in interfaith contexts, though rather rare, I got the following email:

> Life offers multiple opportunities to learn and experience our beliefs. My friend, Ann Holmes Redding, is both a Christian and a Muslim. I am a Buddhist-Baptist. The Jewish writer Mark Epstein, who wrote a book called "Going on Being," told me that there is a whole church of Buddhist-Baptists in Manhattan. Some time ago I went to a Japanese Teriyaki restaurant in the University District of Seattle. The restaurant was run by Koreans. The owner asked me about my religion. I told him. He said that is impossible – to be both a Buddhist and a Baptist. I asked him how a Korean could run a Japanese restaurant? I can't remember now exactly what he said, but you get my point, don't you? ...

12.3. Tuning in to Different Vibrations

Let me not take up this issue of dual or multiple memberships any further. Leaving this issue for further search and for feedback from dialogue friends, allow me to mention here the following: the deeper you go into your own religious experience, the closer or nearer you might feel to those of other faiths in their experiential expressions. This affinity or bond is a fruit and flowering of interfaith dialogue. Let me not label this as 'relativism' or an instance of compromising on one's own faith tenets. Interfaith encounters may and do expose the fellow travellers to a situation of recognizing the limitations of one's own faith languages, in moments when an effort is made to tune in to the vibrations of other faith languages.

12.4. Religious Language as Inter-Religious Language

In answering the question as to 'where do we go from here', one approach would be that of sorting out or marking the kind of dialogue that one is involved in. If the focus is on solving or answering a common issue as reaching out to the downtrodden, the oppressed, the marginalized, the environment, etc., the goal can be outlined, targeted and the success or failure evaluated. If it is the reduction of tension in a pluralistic society, the fruits can be felt and experienced. If the aim is that of the 'Kingdom of God', as a Christian would like to name it, this too can be measured by the 'Kingdom-values'.

13. Conclusion: Transcendence in Exodus

These reflections can be wound up by saying that 'religious language has to be inter-religious language', if it is true that to be 'religious is to be inter-religious'. Turning back, I recall an attitude with which I walked, i.e., an attitude of *self-sufficiency*. A few of my personal friends, who had the duty and courage to guide me, reminded me that we have the *full* truth. In my encounters I heard my own fellow pilgrims telling me that they too are walking along with me with a similar attitude of self-sufficiency, expressed in different formulations of being *the most* tolerant, of *the most* ancient, of being *the latest* in the line of prophets and religions, of *the least* 'dogmatic' and so on.

There were occasions when I had to exclaim that, after all, there is no 'Christian' or 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' God. When we open out to the Jains, Buddhists, and so on, even the use of the word 'God' need not be there in the communication within the experiences of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Can we not point to 'transcendence' as the key-note of being religious? If so, the language of transcendence, in the vertical dimension, refers to the 'Other'; in the horizontal dimension, we reach out to the 'others' and to the 'Nature'. Here we may touch our own boundaries of language, in the transcending experience seeking expressions, of our religious language flowering as inter-religious language.

To illustrate this religious language expressing as 'inter-religious', let me recall a lived-out moment in the dialogue-journey: It was the cultural evening session of first day of our Interfaith World Conference of Religions, Kochi, in 1981. A demonstration piece from the ancient art form of *Kathakali* was being staged, with the story of victory of good over evil. Suddenly, the lights went off. We were all in darkness. For a way out, we used the kerosene lamps and the dance-drama continued. Before the dawn of electric lights *Kathakali* was staged in the light of kerosene lamps.

Recalling the moments when we were all left in darkness, Father George Pulikthiyil, who was helping me out in the organization of the cultural centre, told the mother (she was totally blind) of an actor who was playing a key role in the piece of drama that all of us were in total darkness for a few moments, whereas she was always in darkness. That good mother responded: "Don't say that; I am never in darkness; my light never goes out!" Let me take this ancient prayer, "lead me from darkness to light" (*tamasoma jyotirgamaya*), as an illustration of 'religious' language as 'inter-religious' language.

Journal of Dharma 32, 2 (April-June 2007), 213-220

Reflection: 2

RELEVANCE OF ADVAITA VEDANTA IN CHRISTIAN AND SCIENTISTIC AGE

Bruce G. Wollenberg[◆]

1. Introduction

It has become commonplace to refer to the world as a global village. Given that metaphor, the desirability, even the urgency, of inter-religious understanding hardly requires defending. I would like to endorse the proposal of the late Ninian Smart, Keith Ward, and others that a central goal of dialogue ought to be articulating a global theology based on the premise that various religious traditions are the common property of our species. Such an enterprise would not conduce to a blended religion or a bland amalgam of faith clichés but rather to a strategy of addressing large problems in a coherent fashion.

Finding conversation partners among western theisms is rather straightforward. Things get more complicated, however, when turning eastward, where one encounters assumptions and discourses that appear incommensurable with one's own. Is, for example, Brahman symmetrical with or a placeholder for or typological equivalent of the western deity?

In this article I make that turn and attempt to place Vedanta, in its Advaita form (AV) in conversation with Christian theology. I am especially interested in discovering a common point of departure for challenging dualisms that support, among other things, violence, oppression, and environmental degradation.

2. An Unpromising Partner

At first glance AV would seem to be an unpromising interlocutor. For starters, it is non-theistic or, if you will, super-theistic.[1] The notion of the

---

[◆] **Dr. Bruce G. Wollenberg**, an affiliate professor in the Department of Philosophy at University of Idaho, holds a PhD in Religious Studies from UCSB. At present he is the Interim Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, Santa Barbara, USA.

[1] Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., *The Religion of the Hindus*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953, 238.

self's or soul's participation in the (dualistic) Beatific Vision finds no resonance in AV. Its slogan is *tat tvam asi*: that you are.

A more promising candidate would be the Qualified Non-Dualism of the twelfth century CE Tamil theologian Rāmānuja, whom Arvind Sharma calls "the great theist."[2] He was a vigorous opponent of AV's uncompromising monism and for him God is a distinct personality and the supreme object of love and devotion (*bhakti*).[3] Salvation is the self's (*ātman*) release from limitation; it retains "a permanent intuition of God"[4] and perpetually adores him. Brahman has an abstract, qualityless aspect as the supreme soul (*nirguṇa*) but is at the same time a personal being (*saguṇa*).[5] There is room in Rāmānuja's system for speaking of divine love[6] and grace.[7]

In developing a Christian discourse that is open both to the one Spirit's working in other traditions and to the construction of a global theology, however, one must attend not merely to easier cases but also to more difficult ones. Thus, for the present inquiry I propose to explore theological *contact points* with the Vedanta in its relentlessly monistic form. Yet, despite its initially daunting prospects, such an experiment in what Keith Ward calls comparative theology might offer hope for increased human understanding.[8]

3. Two Scriptural Traditions

AV and Christianity are both scriptural traditions. Both would endorse the notion that "in the beginning was the word." But in the Hindu reading, speech, language itself, the truth about all things, existed before the foundation of the world. In the wholly mythic Hindu narrative, this word is "spoken with" the world. No Moses acted as intermediary. In fact, it is this authorless feature that guarantees the word's authenticity, infallibility, and authority.[9] How is this primordial word, then, introduced into time and space? The myth tells us that it was *heard* by ancient wise ones (*ṛṣis*) – need I say male? – and eventually reduced to writing. The artefact of this scribal activity is Vedic sacred literature (the Vedas), the core of which, the *Ṛg Veda*, dates from 1500 BCE. This collection offers hymns, liturgical chants, sacrificial instructions, magical spells and incantations. The Vedas also contain the idea of caste (*varṇa*). This literature is labelled "*śruti*" (that which is heard).

---

[2] Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, 46.

[3] *New Dimensions in Vedanta Philosophy*, Part II, Shahibaz Amdavad: Swaminarayan Mudran Mandii, 1981, 60.

[4] S. Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, ed., *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, 508.

[5] *New Dimensions in Vedanta Philosophy*, Part II, 160.

[6] *New Dimensions in Vedanta Philosophy*, Part II, 160.

[7] Nancy Auer Falk, *Living Hinduisms*, Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth, 2006, 71.

[8] Keith Ward, *Religion and Human Nature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 9.

There is a second category of sacred writings, non-vedic and called "*smṛti*" (that which is remembered). It includes the famous Laws of Manu (ca. 200 BCE) and the two great Indian epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahabharata*, which includes the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

The foundation of Vedanta, however, is laid in the *Upaniṣads* (ca. 500 BCE), understood to be the end of the Vedas. Implying "sitting near (one's guru) attentively," they are philosophical works that present key concepts that are in play in Hindu thought:

- Brahman: Ultimate Reality, Pure Consciousness, Truth-Awareness-Bliss (*sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*).
- Atman: soul; one's imperishable inner self inseparable from Brahman.
- *Māyā*: ignorance; the universe tricking us into regarding it as permanent.
- Yoga: path, discipline that leads to enlightenment.
- *Mōkṣa* or nirvana: release from endless re-births (*saṁsāra*), absorption into Brahman.[10]

The following short citations would give a taste of the *Upaniṣads*:

> Soundless, formless, intangible, undying, tasteless, odourless, without beginning, without end, eternal, immutable, beyond nature, is the Self. Knowing him as such, one is freed from death.
>
> Brahman alone is – nothing else is. He who sees the manifold universe, and not the one reality, goes evermore from death to death.

---

[9] Eliot Deutsch and J. A. B. Van Buitenen, eds., *A Source Book of Advaita Vedanta*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971, 5.

[10] This can be understood monistically, as by Śaṅkara, or dualistically, as by the thirteenth century philosopher Madhava, also a Vedanta figure. This shows that fundamental Hindu texts, like Christian ones, are multivalent and polysemic.

> This vast universe is a wheel. Upon it are all creatures that are subject to birth, death and rebirth. Round and round it turns, and never stops. It is the wheel of Brahman.
>
> He from whom proceed all works, all desires, all odours, all tastes; who pervades all, who is beyond the senses, and in whom there is fullness of joy forever – he, the heart-enshrined Self, is verily Brahman.[11]

The essential, eternal identity of the individual self and the universal Self is both the content of salvation and the fundamental tenet of AV. Realizing (experiencing) this identification liberates one from the *karma-samsara* trap. One escapes from the wheel.

4. The Great Śaṅkara and Shared Perceptions

The most formidable thinker in the AV tradition and one of the most celebrated figures in the history of Indian philosophy is Śaṅkara (788-820 CE).[12] As a young man he embraced the life of a wandering ascetic (*sannyāsin*, renunciant). During his travels he wrote many scriptural commentaries and attracted disciples because of his austerity and intellectual acuity. He debated advocates of positions other than his undeviating monism and felt, like Luther, that he was not an innovator but a restorer of pure scriptural teaching that had been distorted over time. In addition to establishing the pre-eminence of his philosophical system, he established several ashrams along Buddhist lines throughout the subcontinent.

As Luther battled opponents left and right, Śaṅkara the polemicist contended both with materialism and Mahayana Buddhism.[13] No writing of Śaṅkara's materialist conversation partner, Lōkayata, has survived, but he is said to have held that "consciousness emerges through specific combinations of inanimate, primary (or gross) elements."[14] For Śaṅkara, this gets things precisely backward. There is nothing that does not find its substrate in Brahman. The world of matter is not necessary in relationship to Brahman but is strictly his "play" (*līlā*), making what is sensually apprehensible only relatively real.

---

[11] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. This *Upaniṣad* teaches that creation is not *ex nihilo*; the phenomenal world is non-different from its cause.

[12] So honoured is he that many believe he was an *avatāra* of Śiva. See Natalia Isayeva, *Śaṅkara and Indian Philosophy*, Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993, 2.

[13] Gaudapada, Śaṅkara's most influential teacher, was himself influenced by Buddhism. See Isayeva, *Śaṅkara and Indian Philosophy*, 10.

[14] Isayeva, *Śaṅkara and Indian Philosophy*, 110.

Ontological or metaphysical points of departure for Christians and Hindus are different. One recalls William Temple's famous observation that Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions. But at least two lines of convergence can be traced. One is the assertion that there is a spiritual dimension to All-That-Is and that it is of fundamental importance. Christians would join Vedantins in decrying any Marxist or scientistic reductionism. With Paul we anticipate a kingdom uninheritable by flesh and blood and inhabitable only by spiritual bodies.

Another shared sensibility is that the world is deceptive and can lure the un-alert astray. For Śaṅkara, it presents itself as permanent and dualistic in nature, which is an illusion (he uses the common Hindu term *māyā*) and, unless they awaken to reality-as-one, they cannot escape into *mokṣa*.[15] Śaṅkara does not work with the concept of sin, original or otherwise, but his anthropology assumes, with much of Eastern thought, an "original ignorance (*avidya*)," the antidote for which is *jñāna yoga*, the path of meditation leading to insight.[16] Śaṅkara seems to be the originator of the widely cited metaphor for the mistaken assessment of the world produced by *avidya*: a piece of rope lying in the road is perceived as a snake; nonetheless it remains rope.

5. World and God

Christian theology's robust understanding of the universe as proceeding from the plenitude of the Trinity's love and, therefore, of intrinsic worth stands in contrast to Śaṅkara's strong emphasis on the incommensurability of Brahman and the world. For Christians, the world and God are related to each other dialectically, as Creator and creation. For AV, any distinction between Brahman and the world is illusory and false.[17] There is only Brahman; there cannot be more than a single ontic reality. The frames of reference for the two positions seem wildly divergent. One encourages a positive valuing of the world, the other, a negative, renunciatory attitude. Yet a common frame of reference might derive from an understanding of the world as dependent on and derived from Brahman/God. If it is play, at least it is *divine* play. The world is, in a sense, deified in AV; Brahman can be understood as its "soul."[18] I think, then, an AV perspective is not automatically excluded from a conversation about Earth as God's embodiment and Christ as its logos/atman against the horizon of ecological responsibility. We need partnership to overcome the dualism that allows nature to be set over against humanity and endorses nature's ravaging.[19] If, with George Lindbeck, we reckon that each religious tradition is a language, let it not be said that AV and Christianity speak utter differently about utterly different things.

---

[15] In AV, deep sleep is a metaphor for *mokṣa*, the pure consciousness that is atman and Brahman.

[16] Isayeva, *Śaṅkara and Indian Philosophy*, 229. Śaṅkara offers no explanation of why humans are afflicted with congenital *avidya*.

[17] "The Hymn of Creation" in the *Ṛg Veda* is monistic. See Deutsch, *A Source Book of Advaita Vedanta*, 8.

By engaging AV with a view to constructing a global theology, we would not be encountering ideas that have been the exclusive property of the East. Of the pre-Socratics Parmenides is an outstanding exponent of monistic thinking, and the neo-Platonic Plotinus argued that the world is a work of art expressing the creativity of the divine Being. Accordingly, our sense of individuality and separation from other beings is illusory. Plato himself believed that the soul was pre-existent and immortal. Spinoza held that reality is all one substance; God and nature are two ways of referring to the same thing. The German idealists could be cited. Fichte argued that ultimate reality is a universal moral or spirit order and Brahman is echoed in Hegel's universal Spirit moving through all things. Perhaps the figure closest to Śaṅkara in the West is Meister Eckhart.[20] His key idea was that one can separate oneself from one's adventitious qualities and attributes to discover God deeply in the essential self. Further, closer to our own day, the physicist Ernst Mach thought that a monistic account of the world was the only true one.

Mention of Mach points to ground that both Christianity and AV could possibly occupy together. Both traditions have a stake in rebutting the claims of a scientistic epistemology that disallows the realm of spirit altogether. At the same time, both have to take science seriously to be intellectually credible. Whether or not string theory will remain dominant in physics, as it is at the moment, it seems clear that the quantum world is much more hospitable to a monistic account than was Newton's. Phillip Clayton, the late Arthur Peacocke, and Ian Barbour have done helpful work in this area.[21]

---

[18] Ward, *Religion and Human Nature*, 15.

[19] A Christian thinker, S. J. Samartha notes that AV "has a grand vision of the unity of humans, nature and God" that has social ramifications. See K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Responses to Indian Philosophy*, Kolkata: Punthi Purtak, 2005, 120.

[20] Isayeva, *Śaṅkara and Indian Philosophy*, 117.

6. Conclusion

In advocating for dialogue toward increased theological convergence and prophetic univocity among the traditions, I note that Śaṅkara flourished in a decidedly *dialogical* (and polemical) context. I mentioned above his opposition to the materialism of Lōkayata. He also offered an alternative to the old played-out Brahminism of his day, and was thereby instrumental in helping Hinduism revive itself in a time of Buddhist ascendancy.[22] In Vedanta we have a system engaged with a "heterodox" tradition that itself was a critique of the inherited priestly sacrificial cult.[23]

Sheila Greeve Devaney reminds us that religious traditions are internally plural, historically conditioned, and they possess shifting, porous borders with one another.[24] For example, Vivekananda (d. 1902) rejected Śaṅkara's support of the caste system (*varṇa*) which one would expect to be undercut by the egalitarian derivation of all beings from God.[25] This suppleness is an asset in dialogue in a post-modern context in which both AV and Christianity claim to speak of a Reality that transcends the purely subjective and linguistic. But to do business with one another and embrace the potential of boundaries that leak, each will have to abandon its hegemonic claim of universal validity. Christianity's one-wayism is well known. For its part, AV has touted itself as "perennial philosophy," the unassailable truth behind all particular systems and traditions. Yet, this is a reasonable price to pay to forge a partnership with others who, with due modesty, might inquire together whether there is yet more light to break forth.

---

[21] Barbour thinks the (monistic) Process style of theological reasoning is compatible with recent neuroscience. *Nature, Human Nature and God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002, 96.

[22] F. Samuael Brainard, *Reality and Mystical Experience*, University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000, 156.

[23] Many scholars think that Vedanta and Mahayana are indistinguishable from each other in their main concepts. Śaṅkara, however, rejected the no-self (*anatta*) and emptiness (*śūnya*) dogmas as unvedic. But with regard to spiritual truth, both teach a "higher" knowledge for elites and a "lower" one of images and devotional practices for the masses.

[24] Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 149.

[25] An excellent resource is *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin*,. published by the Center for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

DHARMARAM VIDYA KSHETRAM

Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology and Canon Law

Programmes Offered During 2008-09

I. FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

1. Diploma in Philosophy
2. Bachelor of Philosophy (BPh)
3. Licentiate in Philosophy (LPh) with areas of specialization (a). Systematic Philosophy, (b). East West Philosophical Studies (c). Inter-religious Studies
4. Doctoral Programme (PhD)

II. FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

1. Diploma in Theology and Religious Sciences for Sisters (Jnanodaya)
2. Bachelor of Theology (BTh)
3. Licentiate in Theology (LTh) with areas of specialization (a). Biblical Theology, (b). Systematic Theology , and (c). Moral Theology
4. Doctoral Programme in Theology (ThD)

III. INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL CANON LAW

1. Diploma in Oriental Canon Law,
2. Certificate in Latin and Oriental Canon Law and
3. Licentiate in Oriental Canon Law (LOCL)

IV. INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY AND COUNSELLING

1. M.A. in Formative Spirituality and Counselling
2. One Year Diploma Course: Vinaya Sadhana

Facilities:

- DVK Central Library with a collection of 100,000 books, 30,000 bound volumes, 500 periodicals, Digital Library, Digital Work Station, Internet Access and A/C Multimedia Hall for Seminars and Presentations
- Partial scholarships to deserving PG students and Rev. Sisters
- International Journals: *Journal of Dharma* and *Asian Horizons*
- Hostel facilities on the campus for PG students and Rev. Sisters
- Cafeteria and Banking services on the campus

For application forms and details, please contact:

Registrar, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore - 560 029

Phone: (080) 4111 6302, 4111 6333; Fax (080) 4111 6000

E-mail: registrar@dvk.in; Web www. dvk.in

Subscription Rates

(Effective from January 2006)

Annual Subscription:

India	Rs. 200.00
All Other Countries (Air Mail)	$30.00 or £15.00

Advance Subscription for Three Years:

India	Rs. 500.00
Other Countries (Air Mail)	$80.00 or £41.00

Foundation Subscription (Life Membership):

India	Rs. 5,000.00
Other Countries	$500.0 (or its equivalent)

Single Copy:

India	
Current Issue	Rs. 60.00
Back Issue	Rs. 75.00
Other Countries (Air Mail) (bulk orders will have special reduced prices)	
Current Issue	$10.00 or £5.00
Back Issue	$10.00 or £5.00

Payment is to be made in favour of "**Journal of Dharma, Bangalore.**"
Payments and other subscription related communications may be sent to:
The Managing Editor
Journal of Dharma, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram,
Bangalore 560 029, India.

Editorial Correspondence:

All manuscripts for publication should be sent in electronic format (preferably in MS Word format); entries for consideration should be scientifically documented with notes (MLA style). Digital copy shall be sent to:

The Chief Editor
Journal of Dharma, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram
560 029 Bangalore, India
E-mail: saju@chackalackal.com
Fax: +91-80-4111 6000

All business correspondence should be addressed to:

The Managing Editor
Journal of Dharma, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram
560 029 Bangalore, India
E-mail: info@journalofdharma.com

Reg. No. R.N. 27399/75 ISSN: 0253-7222

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies

Forthcoming Issues

2007 Vol. 32:

3. Law and Religion: Forces of Liberation
4. Religion, Economics, and Development

2008 Vol. 33:

1. Human Person: Brain-Mind-Soul
2. Religious Ethos and Environmental Ethics
3. Religion and National Integration
4. Religion and Language

2009 Vol. 34:

1. Sex and Religion: Contemporary Response
2. Trends in Philosophy in Third Millennium
3. Politics of Violence and Religion
4. Re-emergence of Religion

International Indexing: *Journal of Dharma* is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, Chicago; in *Arts & Humanities Citation Index* (A&HCI) and *Current Contents/Arts & Humanities* (CC/A&B) of the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI), University City Science Center, Philadelphia, PA 19104; in *Philosopher's Index*, Philosopher's Information Center, 1616 E. Wooster St., Bowling Green University, OH 43402; in *ATLA Religion Database*, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; *Religion Indexes*, 5600 South Woodlawn Ave., Chicago, IL. 60637; in *Bowker Serials Bibliographies*, 1180 Avenue of the Americas, NY 10036; in *Science of Religion* published by Root and Branches, Cambridge, England.

Microfilms: University Microfilms International, Michigan, Religious & Theological Abstracts: Myerstown, PA 17067.

Website: www.journalofdharma.com
Email: editor@journalofdharma.com

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, 560 029 Bangalore, India

Printed at
National Printing Press
560 095 Bangalore, India